‘Abalos packaged ₱1.3-billion computer contract’

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PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS FEARLESS VIEWS

Wednesday, January 14, 2004 ★★ 52 pages / 5 sections / vol. 19 / no. 37 P15

Spare trees, pols told

KILLER ANG NASA POSTER DITO!

By Volt Contreras

POLITICIANS, stay away from that tree. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources yesterday appealed to all candidates in the forthcoming elections to desist from "crucifying" hapless trees

SPARE A4

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 5 Pangasinan cop chiefs sacked over ‘jueteng’ ACROSS /A17
- Mirant readies P18-B public offering BUSINESS /B1
- Comelec: Bro. Eddie in NEWS /A9

SC ruling leaves May polls in a mess

Comelec computer contract nullified

By Philip C. Tubeza

BLAMING the Commission on Elections for placing national elections "at grave risk," the Supreme Court yesterday scrapped the controversial P1.3-billion contract for automated polls.

The high court also ordered the Ombudsman to investigate the criminal liability of those involved, and the solicitor general to recover the P849,167,697.41 that had already been spent for the project.

"The illegal, imprudent and hasty actions of the commission have not only desecrated legal and jurisprudential norms, but have also cast serious doubts upon the poll body's ability and capacity to conduct automated elections," the high court said.

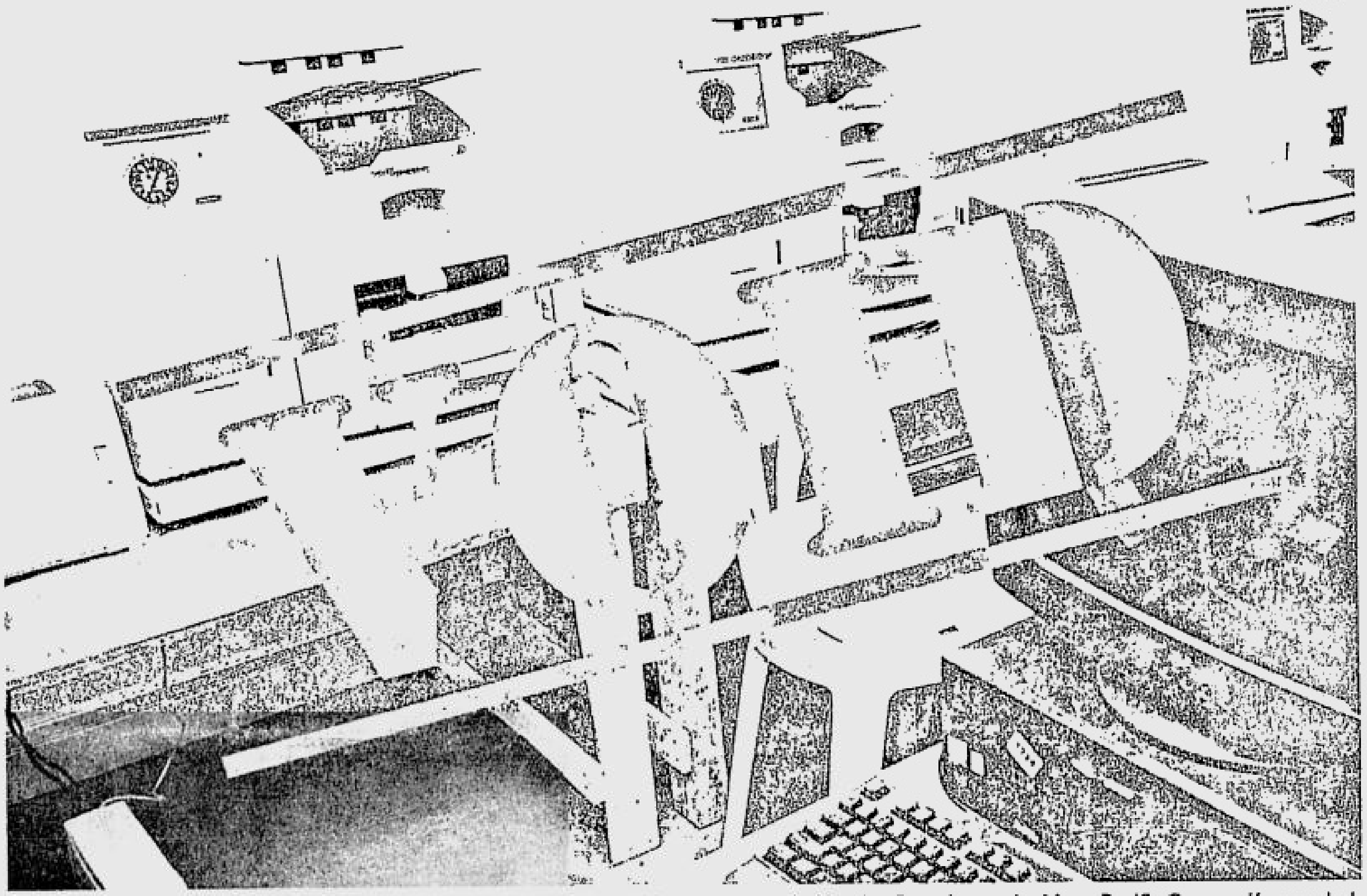
In a strongly worded *(See Page A20)* 101-page decision, the court en banc voided the Comelec's contract with Mega-Pacific eSolutions (MPEI) after it found that the Comelec violated the law and its own bidding rules when it awarded the contract.

The high court also found MPEI's counting machines to be vulnerable "to election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few key strokes."

The court voted 9-3-2, with three justices dissenting and two asking for more time.

This marks the second time the high court voided an election

SC RULING A20



THE P1.3-B CONTRACT to supply 2,700 automated counting machines was awarded by the Comelec to the Mega Pacific Corp., a Korean-led consortium. The poll body's P3-B modernization program is structured into 3 phases: voters validation system, automated counting and canvassing, electronic transmission/consolidation and dissemination of results.

PDI PHOTO ERIK ARAZAS

It's back to manual counting of votes

By Michael Lim Ubac
Margaux C. Ortiz
and Cyntia D. Balana

ALL are resigned to manual counting of votes although the Supreme Court did not say that the Commission on Elections should go back to the 50-year-old system. But not everyone agrees that the May 10 elections should be postponed.

"*Mano-mano (manual) tayo*," opposition Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. yesterday enunciated the sentiments of both opposition and administration senators following the Supreme Court ruling invalidating the Comelec's contract with a consortium for automated counting.

Pimentel said the Comelec would just have to print and distribute the ballots and appoint poll watchers. He urged the Comelec to use the reservists of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for poll watching duties instead of tapping public school teachers.

The National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) said the Comelec should bite the bullet and make the shift to manual counting.

IT'S BACK A8

‘Abalos packaged ₱1.3-B contract’

AT A GLANCE

- SC castigates Comelec for its "illegal and imprudent" contract with Mega-Pacific eSolutions;
- Orders: Ombudsman to probe criminal liability of public officials and "conspiring private individuals, if any;" and the Solgen to recover P1.3-B from the payee; to stop Comelec from implementing any automation-related contract.
- Comelec violated law and its own rules on bidding and procedures.
- Counting machines vulnerable "to election fraud on massive scale."
- GMA asked to replace all Comelec commissioners.
- Legislators urge Comelec not to appeal the SC decision so it could prepare for manual counting.
- House to rush passage of bill postponing elections by 10 to 14 days.
- Holding of absentee voting abroad in March may be postponed.

A BRIEF on the Supreme Court's decision and its consequences.

PDI PH

By Jerry Esplanada

BENJAMIN Abalos himself "packaged" the P1.3-billion contract for computerization, according to one of the petitioners who filed the automated polls case against the Commission on Elections.

The source also alleged that a "Korean supplier-friend" of Abalos', when he was still chair of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, helped the Comelec chief in packaging the deal.

Abalos, a former Mandaluyong City mayor, headed the MMDA from January to August 1990. He was reappointed to the same position in January 2001 by President Macapagal-Arroyo. In June 2002, he was named chair of the Comelec, the constitutional agency responsible for the conduct of all elections.

Another source, from the information technology community, pointed to Eduardo Mejos, chair of the Comelec bids and awards committee, when asked for additional information on the deal.

"[Mejos] should know. He was the top finance official of MMDA during Abalos' term. He's already retired but Chairman Abalos brought him to the Comelec. There, he became chairman of the bids [and awards] committee," the source also said.

Attempts last night to contact the agency, through Mejos, proved futile when a member of his staff said they were told that he would not be giving any comment for the moment.

"That Korean supplier was the one who introduced him to another Korean supplier who's part of the consortium that won the bidding," the first source said.

The petitioner was apparently referring to the South Korean IT provider SK C & C Co. Ltd.

The same source also disclosed that the Mega Pacific Consortium grouped "Comelec suppliers of ballot papers and boxes during the past 10 years."

Mega Pacific eSolutions Inc. is the majority partner of a consortium composed of SK C & C Co. Ltd., WeSolv Open Computing Inc., Election.com Ltd. and ePLDT.

The consortium has supplied Comelec a total of 1,991 auto-

ABALOS A8

How now? Poll body confused

By Martin P. Marfil

SHOULD the government consider the P1.3 billion paid for the machines lost? Will that mean a shift to manual elections?

Will the Commission on Elections procure ballot boxes for manual counting? How will this affect overseas voting which will start in March? Can we use the ballots for the automated elections for manual elections?

These were some of the questions that surfaced yesterday as Comelec officials tried to get more details about the Supreme Court decision voiding the contract for automated counting machines.

Most of the questions, left unanswered, were raised by mid-level Comelec executives who admitted they were sur

HOW A8

No money for GMA ‘telenovela’

By Alcuin Papa

"GLORIA" has packed up.

A *telenovela* of that title on the life and times of President Macapagal-Arroyo has been shelved for lack of funding, according to a member of the production team.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, yesterday told the INQUIRER that the *telenovela* was to have been shown in 40 30-minute episodes with teen idol Jolina Magdangal and superstar Nora Aunor playing the subject in her youth and in her prime, respectively.

It was to have been aired on the 6 p.m. prime-time slot over RPN-9, NBN-4 and IBC-13, all government-owned and -controlled networks, and government radio station Radyo ng Bayan, and ended just before the Feb. 10 start of the official campaign period for national candidates so as not to violate the rules laid down by the Commission on

NO A4

US plans to file antitrust case vs RP telecom firms; GMA mad

By Gil Cabacungan Jr.
and Abigail L. Ho

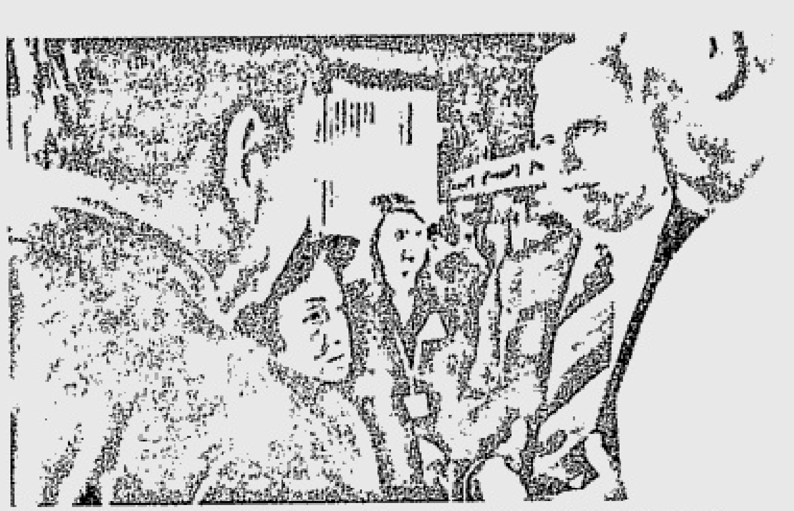
THE MOVE of the US Department of Justice to summon 30 Filipino telecommunication executives attending a conference in Hawaii is part of the groundwork for the filing of an antitrust case against Philippine telecommunication firms, according to the Philippine ambassador to the United States.

"The US justice department is conducting an independent investigation to ascertain whether there have been violations of the antitrust law," Ambassador Albert del Rosario told the INQUIRER yesterday. "The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) has indicated that this is being done on a totally independent basis."

Del Rosario said that from the information obtained by his office in Washington, the US justice department was looking into the possibility that there was collusion among Philippine companies when they raised termination rates by 50 percent to 12 US cents per minute for land line calls and by 33 percent to 16 cents per minute for mobile phone calls.

Termination rates are the fees charged by Philippine firms for

US PLANS A4



THE HONOLULU incident is explained by US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone to DFA Secretary Delia Albert, Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo and RP envoy to the US Albert del Rosario.

EDWIN BACASMAS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Northern Luzon will experience cloudy skies with rains. Eastern Visayas and Eastern Mindanao will have mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers.
SOURCE PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/01/14/04

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	**Iloilo/Bacolod**	Partly Cloudy
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	**Roxas**	Partly Cloudy
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	**Cebu**	Partly Cloudy
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	**Tacloban**	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	**Gen. Santos**	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	**Zamboanga**	Partly Cloudy
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	**Cagayan de Oro**	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	**Davao**	Cloudy with Rains

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Second FRONTPAGE

GMA betraying Noli–Joker

By Christine O. Avendaño

NOLI no longer relevant?

If the Charter change initiative succeeds and a parliamentary government is established, Noli de Castro would be "reduced to irrelevance," Sen. Joker Arroyo said yesterday.

Arroyo has accused President Macapagal-Arroyo of betraying her running mate for the latter's support of renewed efforts by some lawmakers to amend the Constitution.

"What would happen to Noli? A vice president has no place of consequence in a parliamentary government," Arroyo said in a statement.

"Noli, or for that matter, Loren, would be reduced to irrelevance," said Arroyo, who like De Castro belongs to the exclusive Wednesday Group in the Senate.

With less than a month before taking a break for the election campaign, Arroyo confidently told reporters that Congress would not be able to pass the Charter change measure. He said that even if the Senate and House were able to pass a concurrent resolution for the convening of a Con-con to tackle Charter changes, the two chambers still need to pass an "enabling legislation."

"It's a two-step process and this takes time," Arroyo said.

Senate kills Charter change for lack of time

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE SENATE last night effectively killed the renewed Charter change initiative after its main proponent in the chamber told the plenary there was simply no more time to tackle the issue.

Under interpellation by administration Sen. Robert Barbers, Sen. Edgardo Angara said that in the interest of thoroughness, Charter change would best be left to the "next fresh" Congress.

Angara said he didn't think it was "wise" for the outgoing senators to hijack the decision on constitutional change.

While he reaffirmed the opposition senators' commitment to amending the Constitution to effect a change to a parliamentary system, Angara said that approving the resolution calling for Constitutional convention would only cloud the May 10 national elections so that "meaningful insights" would be lost.

He said complex infrastructure to support a Con-con would need to be put in place and he doubted the ability of the incumbent administration to do so within the tight time frame.

While he agreed with Barbers that the holding of elections for the Con-con delegates simultaneously with the May elections would be significantly cheaper than electing delegates in an entirely separate ballot, Angara said a separate, delayed election of Con-con delegates would best serve the nation.

The debate was suspended after Senate President Franklin Drilon called for an all-senators caucus to thresh out the ramifications of the Angara resolution.

Drilon earlier admitted that the chamber lacked the time to adequately tackle the issue of Charter change as he noted that the 16 remaining session days would be allotted for debates on the national budget.

At the House, congressmen favoring constitutional amendments through a constituent assembly yesterday again tried to revive the fast-track initiative.

Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Barbers said there was still time to conduct marathon sessions, including whole-day sessions and Thursdays and Fridays, to consider the numerous drafts of the proposed Charter amendments.

"If Congress really wants much-needed amendments, it's still possible to fast-track Charter changes through a constituent assembly," the younger Barbers said.

He said there were already numerous drafts of the proposed Charter amendments in the House so that ratification could be held simultaneously with the May elections.

Barbers said that the 15 remaining session days were enough for both chambers of Congress to act on the proposed amendment bills. *With a report from Cynthia Balana and Celina Ribeiro*

GMA won't meddle in sale of Equitable

By Gil C. Cabacungan

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo will not interfere in deals entered into by government banks and financial institutions unlike her disgraced predecessor.

"I don't interfere in business transactions of government financial institutions. That was the problem of the previous administration, it meddled too much in business transactions of the GFIs," the President said in a statement released yesterday.

The President issued the statement in the wake of appeals made by some sectors for her to intervene and stop the Social Security System from selling its 29 percent controlling stake in Equitable-PCIBank worth P8 billion to the Banco de Oro group of shopping mall tycoon Henry Sy, at a price below its acquisition cost.

The President said she has full trust and confidence in the capability of SSS president Cora de la Paz whom she cited for her "unassailable reputation and integrity."

"This is why I don't interfere in her decision. I went to the trouble of choosing who I feel is the right person [to lead the SSS] and I must trust her judgment unless otherwise called for," the President said.

The merger of the Equitable Banking Corp. and PCIBank was one of the controversial deals concluded during the Estrada administration, in which the Equitable Bank acquired a controlling stake in the bigger PCIBank with the help of the SSS.

The pension fund bought the Equitable-PCIBank shares at more than P90 each.

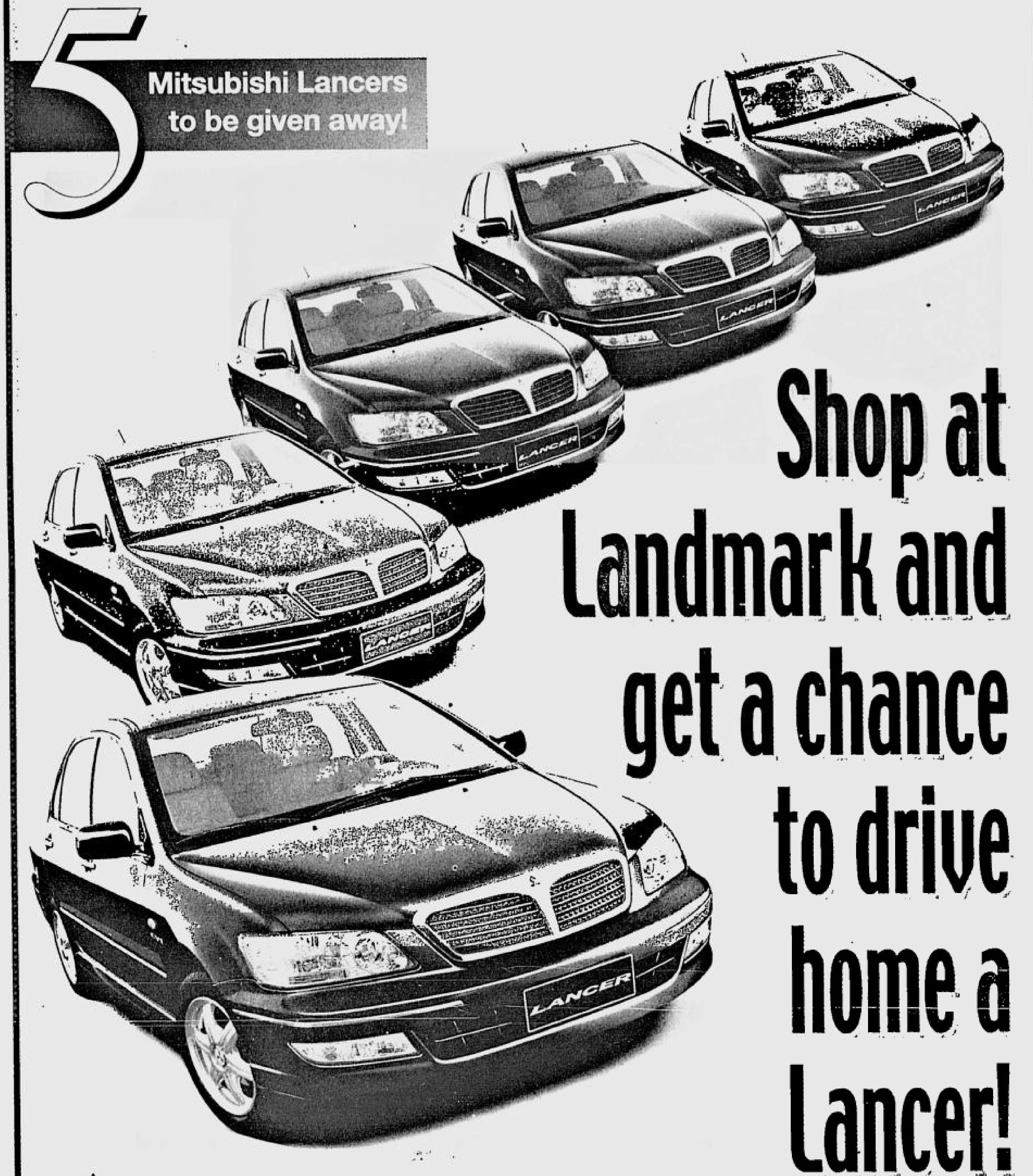
One of the sins laid on the door of deposed President Joseph Estrada was that he allegedly pressured the state-run pension funds, the SSS and the Government Service Insurance System, into buying stocks of companies owned by his cronies.

Most of the financial troubles plaguing the SSS and GSIS has been traced to questionable stock market transactions made during the Estrada administration that left the pension funds holding stock portfolios with a value that is less than half the cost of acquisition.

De la Paz has defended the sale of the SSS holdings in Equitable-PCIBank, claiming the SSS would not lose in the deal, "if the BDO group acquires additional blocs of shares of E-PCIB through a negotiated purchase within 6 months at a higher price than the agreed effective price."

She noted that the BDO was buying the Equitable-PCIBank shares at P43.50 per share, or 30 percent higher than the stock's last trading price of P33.50 prior to the deal.

She said the SSS received a combination of a cash down payment and secured promissory note with an aggregate face value of P14 billion.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   b. July 20, 2004, 8:00pm for the Grand Draw.
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6. See posters for complete details.

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TRAVEL PERMIT

Sandigan firm on Erap ruling

By Armand N. Nocum

THE SANDIGANBAYAN special division yesterday denied it violated its Rules of Procedures when it approved a controversial resolution allowing ousted President Estrada to go to the United States for knee replacement surgery.

In a statement, spokesperson Renato Bocar said the anti-graft court adhered to the provisions of its Revised Internal Rules which provide that the "additional justices shall be designated by raffle and on rotation basis."

Bocar was reacting to a published commentary from former Senate President Jovito Salonga who claimed to have obtained "unimpeachable information" indicating that the two justices who participated in deliberations on the Estrada resolution were "merely handpicked" by Presiding Justice Minita Chico-Nazario.

Sandigan rules provide that in cases where no unanimous vote is obtained from the three regular members of the division, a special division of five should be constituted, with the two additional members being designated by raffle on a rotation basis.

Bocar complained that Salonga's statement was "very much unfair" and "below the belt, no doubt."

Bocar explained that Nazario's office "keeps a record of the number of times that the individual justices have been designated to a special division and that the justices who happen to have the least number of designations on record are the ones appointed to complete the required membership in the special division of five."

He said it was a mere coincidence that when the special division of five was being constituted to hear the Estrada motion, Justice Diosdado M. Peralta and Justice Norberto Y. Geraldez Sr. just happened to have been designated to sit in a special division of five the least number of times.

It was therefore "unavoidable" that "their names would be picked from the list of the other members of the Sandiganbayan," Bocar said.

Salonga claimed in his article that Peralta and Geraldez were picked because of the perception that they were "*madaling pakiusapan* (easily persuaded)."

He also claimed that the "special division never conducted a deliberation to resolve the motion as the justices were simply asked to sign for or against the motion."

This was disputed by Bocar who said that the "newly constituted special division of five met and discussed" the Estrada motion on Dec. 22 in accordance with the court's Revised Internal Rules.

He said the rules provide that "rulings on all written motions on interlocutory or incidental matters shall be reached in consultation among the justices participating in the consideration" of the issue at hand.

"It was only after such deliberation that the final ruling of the special division was prepared and circulated for the signatures of the justices in preparation for its promulgation in the following day, Dec. 23, 2003," he said of the resolution penned by Nazario.

Salonga said the violation of the court rules makes the constitution of the special division "defective" and that it shows a "loss of independence of the anti-graft court."

He said he suspected the resolution was crafted to conform with President Macapagal-Arroyo's policy of "total reconciliation" with enemies and opponents of the government, including Estrada's supporters.

Envoy vows to help Erap with US visa

PHILIPPINE Ambassador to the US Albert del Rosario said the government was prepared to make representations with Washington to help deposed President Joseph Estrada secure an American visa for his knee operation in the US.

"We at the Philippine embassy are going to be helpful if the Sandiganbayan has agreed to allow him to travel for humanitarian reasons," Del Rosario said. "I can make representation to the extent that we want to help him in a humanitarian way and that he does need medical treatment."

Del Rosario said a big hurdle in getting a US visa for Estrada was Washington's policy on applicants that were on trial for a capital offense.

"They will have to take a careful look at this because if you allow him to go to the US or any other country, there is a high possibility he may not want to return because he is on trial," Del Rosario said.

While Del Rosario said the Philippines would see how it could help the former President, the US still retained the sovereign right to issue or not to issue a visa.

Bayan Muna eyes repeat of 2001

By Norman Bordadora

THE LEFT-LEANING Bayan Muna yesterday vowed to repeat its 2001 performance of obtaining the most number of votes among the party-list groups despite running against and not with the administration team this time around.

Bayan Muna, which in 2001 was fielded as part of the administration's People Power Coalition, now has to deal with a hostile rather than supportive government.

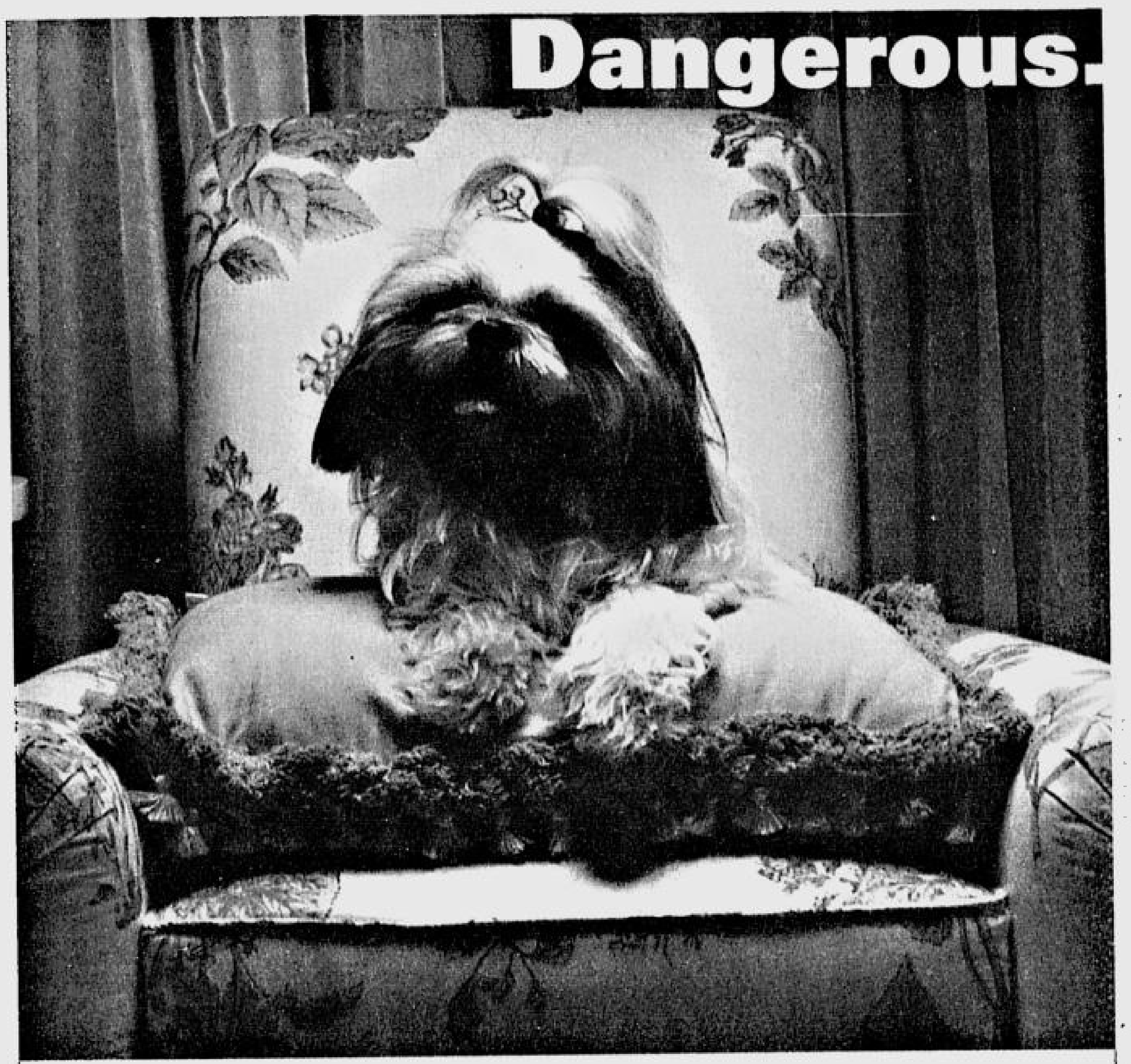
But Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo, who spoke at the group's party convention yesterday, said that even with reduced resources and machinery, and with an adversarial relationship to the party in power, Bayan Muna was prepared for the challenge.

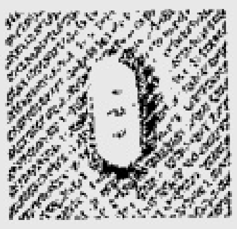
"Even in the 2001 elections, we didn't get a free ride on the administration's machinery and resources. We have modes of mutual assistance with individual senatorial candidates who we thought had progressive ideas," Ocampo said.

"[Individual candidates] helped us with some of our materials and transportation. We helped them by endorsing them to the people. There was no horse-trading there since we actually believed in them and in their progressive programs," he said.

Ocampo said one of the problems facing the group was the military's declaration of potential elections hot spots in places where Bayan Muna is expected to have a strong showing. These are areas reportedly under the influence of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party.

"That we have anything to do with the NPA is black propaganda being peddled by the military," he said, warning that Bayan Muna should not be stopped from campaigning in those areas or "there will be failure of elections."





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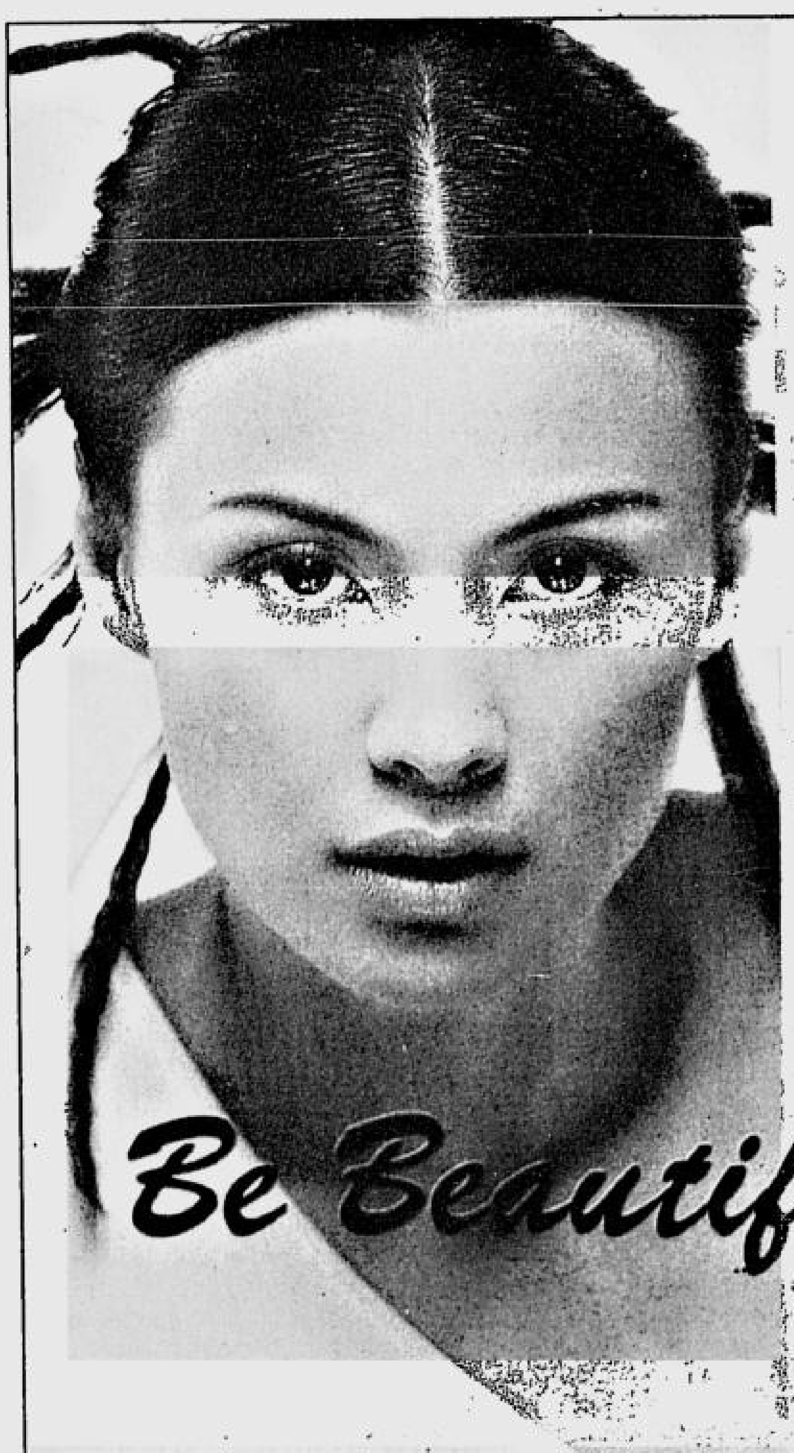

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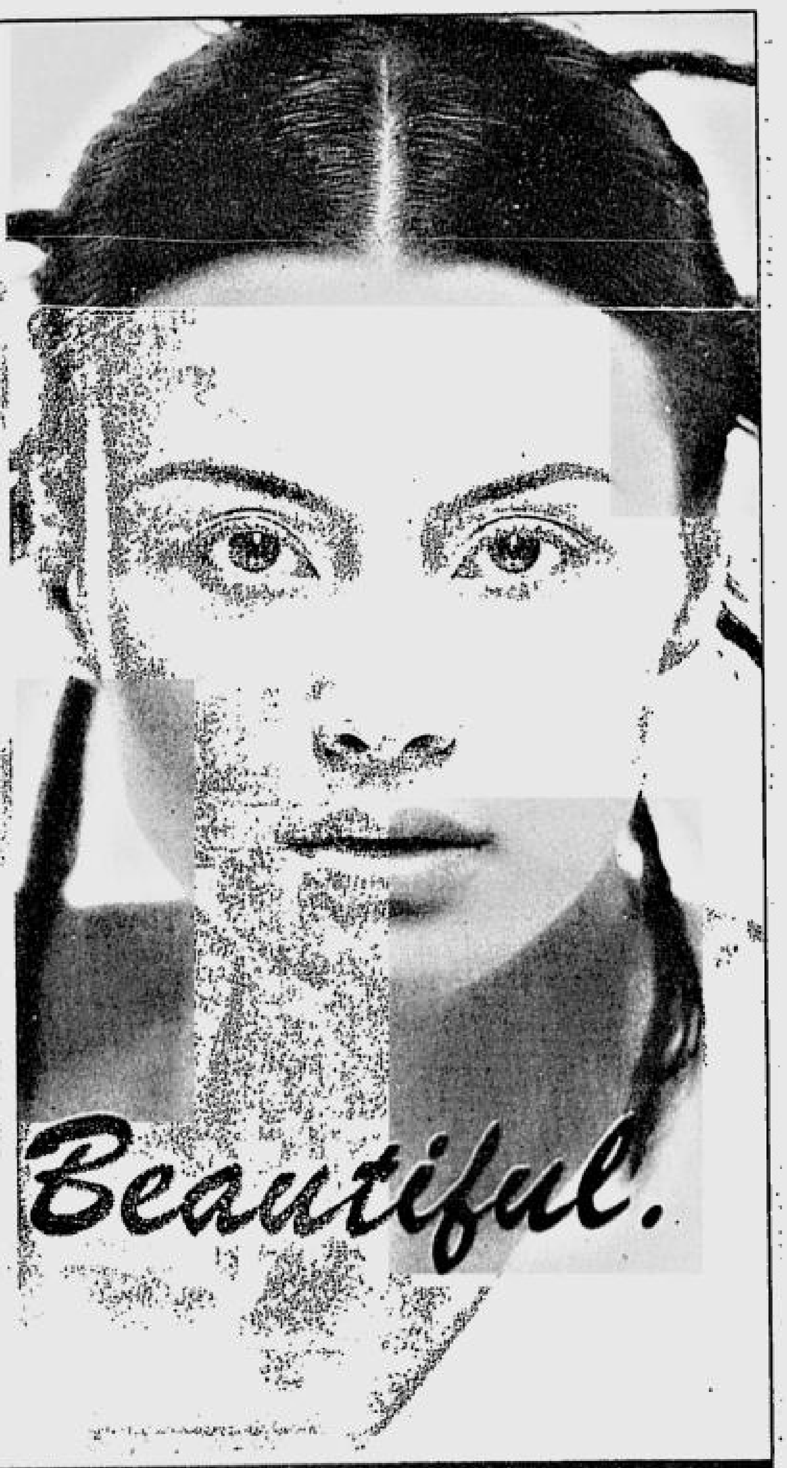

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US plans to file antitrust case vs RP telecom firms; GMA mad

From page A1

servicing calls coming from US carriers.

The Philippine firms decided to raise termination rates effective Feb. 1, 2003, to help them cope with hard times. But US firms AT&T Corp. and MCI International opposed this.

The local telecommunication firms that may be included in the antitrust suit are the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. and its mobile unit, Smart Communications Inc., run by the Hong Kong-based First Pacific group; the Ayala-controlled Globe Telecom Inc.; the Gokongwei-owned Digital Telecommunications Inc.; and the Lopez-controlled Bayan Telecommunications Inc.

The 30 Filipino executives attending the Pacific Telecommunications Council Conference in Honolulu were issued summonses by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents last weekend to attend a grand jury hearing on Jan. 15 in the same city.

Executives of AT&T and MCI International have also been summoned to appear in court, according to Jorge Sarmiento, deputy commissioner of the Philippines' National Telecommunications Commission (NTC).

Unsettling

Sarmiento said the issuance of the summonses was not only "embarrassing" but also "unsettling" because these were served at a time when Philippine and US carriers were coming to terms on the matter of termination rates.

He said the NTC was drafting a letter asking the FCC, its US counterpart, to come to the aid of the Filipino executives.

"It seems that what one agency is doing, the other one does not know. Also, [FCC chair] Michael Powell had even written the NTC a letter dated Jan. 5 expressing pleasure over the agreements forged between Philippine and US carriers," Sarmiento said yesterday in a phone interview.

He said he and top executives of Philippine telecommunications firms agreed at a meeting yesterday to continue gathering more facts that could aid those summoned in getting out of their predicament.

He also said the top executives were "really angered by what the FBI did," and "happy with and supportive of what the [Department of Foreign Affairs] did."

Sarmiento was referring to Philippine Foreign Secretary Delia Albert's summoning of US Ambassador to Manila Francis Ricciardone on Monday to explain the incident in Honolulu and to officially receive notice of the Philippine government's "concern and dismay."

Unwarranted

In Malacañang, President Macapagal-Arroyo said the FBI action was "unwarranted" and asked Washington for an immediate explanation.

"We have a strong, constructive relationship and this should not be marred by such incidents," the President said in a statement. "There must be amends if a mistake was made or if harassment is proven. We ask for decency and dignity in the treatment of Filipinos in legitimate business or work in any foreign land."

Airing the Philippine government's position, Del Rosario said the antitrust probe was "uncalled for and totally baseless" and the rate increases were "private transactions."

Albert said the US move was regrettable, especially because all parties concerned had agreed to resolve the issue through dialogue.

Alarming

Albert said in a statement that the US move was "alarming and perhaps motivated by the desire of the complainants to embarrass the Filipino telecom executives while abroad, and perhaps even the Philippine government in general."

"This action by the US Department of Justice goes against the understandings we had achieved through negotiations. This is inconsistent with what has been discussed and is an action that we would not expect from a close friend and ally," she said.

Albert also said she had directed the Philippine consul general in Honolulu to ensure that the rights of the Filipinos summoned would be protected.

'Price-fixing'

Ricciardone said he had acted on the Philippines' disappointment over the summonses.

"People are all nervous; they want to know what's going to happen, and I do, too," he said.

Ricciardone said the US and Philippine governments had allowed their respective industries to take the lead in what he described as a "very technical and complicated issue about pricing and price-fixing."

He said this strategy bore fruit after the PLDT and American telephone giant AT&T "came to an agreement, and we thought that was pretty much as a result of it."

The FCC, which had ordered the US carriers to stop paying Philippine carriers until they roll back their rates, and the NTC recently resolved the issue with the restoration of call connections and allowing industry players to negotiate the rates on their own. *With a report from AFP*

THE QUESTION is: Will the elections have to be delayed to give the Comelec enough time to prepare for the outmoded and time-intensive mode of manual voting and counting? PDI PHOTO

Comelec forewarned of problem—Namfrel

By Margaux Ortiz and Gil Cabacungan Jr.

"THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) has been forewarned of this problem."

National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) officials yesterday said they were not surprised that the contract on the automated counting machines was challenged and later declared null and void by the Supreme Court.

"We told Comelec officials, especially Chair Benjamin Abalos, as early as nine months ago that they should have kept everything transparent," Namfrel national chair Jose Concepcion Jr. said in a press conference.

Namfrel executive chair Guillermo Luz said the Namfrel officials had been worried about the contract's phases and had sensed something irregular about them.

"This mess should have been entirely avoidable 12 to 15 months ago," Luz emphasized.

Luz also said that the high court decision was a major blow to both the Comelec and the electoral process, adding that the ruling would also shake investors' confidence.

"The only way to restore some confidence in the market is to shift back to a full manual plan as soon as possible," Luz said.

But Luz expressed confidence that the elections would push through on May 10 as long as the Comelec begins preparations for a manual tabulation immediately.

"It can be done," he said.

Concepcion said that as early as last year, his group and Church leaders had appealed to Comelec Commissioner Luz Tantangco (who was the subject of an impeachment complaint) to ensure that the bidding for the project be made transparent, particularly on procedure and specifications.

"We knew that the project could face legal troubles which we wanted to avoid because we all knew how important the project is for the elections," Concepcion said.

In its statement, Namfrel said it was imperative for the Comelec to shift to a full manual count for the May 10 elections. While there was no time to re-bid the project, Namfrel said the Comelec had ample time to shift its present plans to full manual.

Concepcion said it would be more "difficult and chaotic" to amend the law and postpone the elections beyond May 10 rather than stick with the schedule and do what the country has been doing over the past 50 years.

"We have the ballot boxes and the bureaucracy in place to hold manual elections. The last barangay elections two years ago proves that we can do this with everybody's cooperation," Concepcion said.

No money for GMA . . .

From page A1

Elections concerning campaign ads on TV, the source said.

Dramatic treatment

According to the source, not only "dramatic treatment" but also commercials were planned for the *telenovela*. "It had to catch the attention of the viewers," the source said.

The plan also included compressing the *telenovela* into a movie to be shown from roving vans in the provinces, the source said.

Ms Macapagal's life story would have also been produced in comics form by the government-run Public Information Agency, likewise for distribution in the provinces.

"This was supposed to be a multi-media production that would reach the [biggest] number of voters ostensibly to push for the candidacy of GMA," the source said.

Overtaken by events

Msgr. Nico Bautista, an incorporator of the Ahon Movement Inc. that was producing the *telenovela*, confirmed to the INQUIRER that the project was shelved because of "financial constraints."

"Also, there is no more time," he said.

Bautista said that the show was conceptualized last December at the Malacañang Executive House, and that the decision to shelve it was made before the year ended. He refused to give details on the meetings but said voters had "a right to know more of the persona of our leaders."

Like Bautista, the source said the meetings to finalize the project started last December. The *telenovela* was to have aired starting on Dec. 15 until Feb. 6.

Asked whether the show was to have been used for Ms Macapagal's campaign to seek a full six-year term, Bautista said: "We can speculate, but she never ran for president until now. She owes it to the people to [let them] know who she is."

Bautista also said the production had been "overtaken by events in a way" because "Biodata," a show featuring the candidates for election, is now running on GMA 7.

He also said Ahon could have planned other productions for the other candidates, but "I don't think our foundation can handle that anymore."

Private organization

The Ahon Movement Inc. is a nongovernment organization incorporated in July 2002 with a start-up capital of P100,000, according to records at the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Its other listed incorporators are Allen Frost Uriarte, Veronica Otarra, Linda Guilles, Vince Camba and Remedios Ramsay.

The NGO lists its address at 603 S&L Bldg., 1500 Roxas Blvd., Manila.

Spare the trees, politicians told

From page A1

during the campaign season.

A "no nails, no staple wires" policy should be adopted by political parties and their supporters when posting campaign materials on trees, whether in cities or in rural areas, the DENR said.

Light, biodegradable adhesives like homemade *gawgaw* (starch) paste is a lot more "earth-friendly," according to Environment Secretary Elisea Gozun.

Infections, wounds

For decades now, forestry experts have been noting "a sudden increase in tree infections" five to six months after an election. Gozun said this was because of the "wounds" left by nails and staples.

"Unless rehabilitated through surgery, an infected tree can die in one or two years," she warned. "Trees are so important in urban areas, yet they usually end up as casualties in every election. A tree 'bleeds' when its bark is punctured, and the inner part that processes its food is exposed to the elements."

Gozun added: When a neighborhood loses a single mature tree, it denies itself the equivalent of "20 to 30 air-conditioning units" in terms of lowering solar heat, as well as heat generated by vehicular and other exhaust systems.

No-nails policy

The campaign season officially kicks off on Feb. 10. The DENR chief challenged politicians to opt for the "No Nails" policy and give real "luster" to their pro-environment stance.

Most campaigners break the law by ignoring Omnibus Election Code provisions designating common display areas for election materials, Gozun said.

They should "break a vicious cycle" instead, she said, by sparing the trees.

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Gov't, NDF to resume peace talks next month

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

THE GOVERNMENT will resume formal peace talks with the communist-led National Democratic Front in Norway next month despite the recent spate of attacks by the Maoist rebels.

"The formal talks between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front will resume next month in a foreign venue," President Macapagal-Arroyo said in a statement.

Ms Macapagal said the resumption of formal peace talks with the communists "is a new source of momentum for our political and economic security." She said details of the negotiations were still being ironed out by both sides with the Norwegian government which has brokered a peace process to end the 35-year-old insurgency problem.

"I commend both sides for their work and I thank the Royal Norwegian government for its gracious assistance and support," Ms Macapagal said in a statement.

Norway, which has played high-profile roles in brokering peace talks in Sri Lanka and other parts of the world, has hosted several sessions of exploratory talks between the government and communist negotiators since last year.

The government suspended the last round of peace talks in Oslo in 2001 after communist guerrillas assassinated some lawmakers and local officials whom they had accused of human rights violations.

Silvestre Bello III, chair of the government panel, expressed confidence that a final peace agreement could be signed before the President's term ends in June. She is seeking a full term in the May elections. *With reports from Reuters, AP, AFP*

Swanie for prexy? You must be joking

By Carlito Pablo

SWANIE instead of Ronnie?

"Administration and opposition congressmen yesterday took turns at shooting down the prospect of fielding actor Fernando Poe Jr.'s wife, actress Susan Roces, if it is proven that he is a foreign citizen and, therefore, cannot run for president.

"I hope it's a joke," said Rep. Abraham Mitra (LDP, Palawan) of former Sen. Ernesto Maceda's statement on Monday that Mrs. Poe might replace Mr. Poe. "Even so, it's a bad joke."

This was "not a movie" where the lead actor could use a "double" for difficult stunts, Rep. Prospero Nograles (Lakas, Davao City) snapped.

Rep. Prospero Pichay Jr. (Lakas, Surigao del Sur) taunted the opposition, saying it was "clutching at straws and running scared," and that the suggested switch was "an act of desperation."

The citizenship issue was "constitutional, not political," Pichay said, reacting to charges that Malacañang was behind the filing of the petition questioning the actor's citizenship before the Commission on Elections. "The Constitution clearly states that only natural-born Filipinos can run for president."

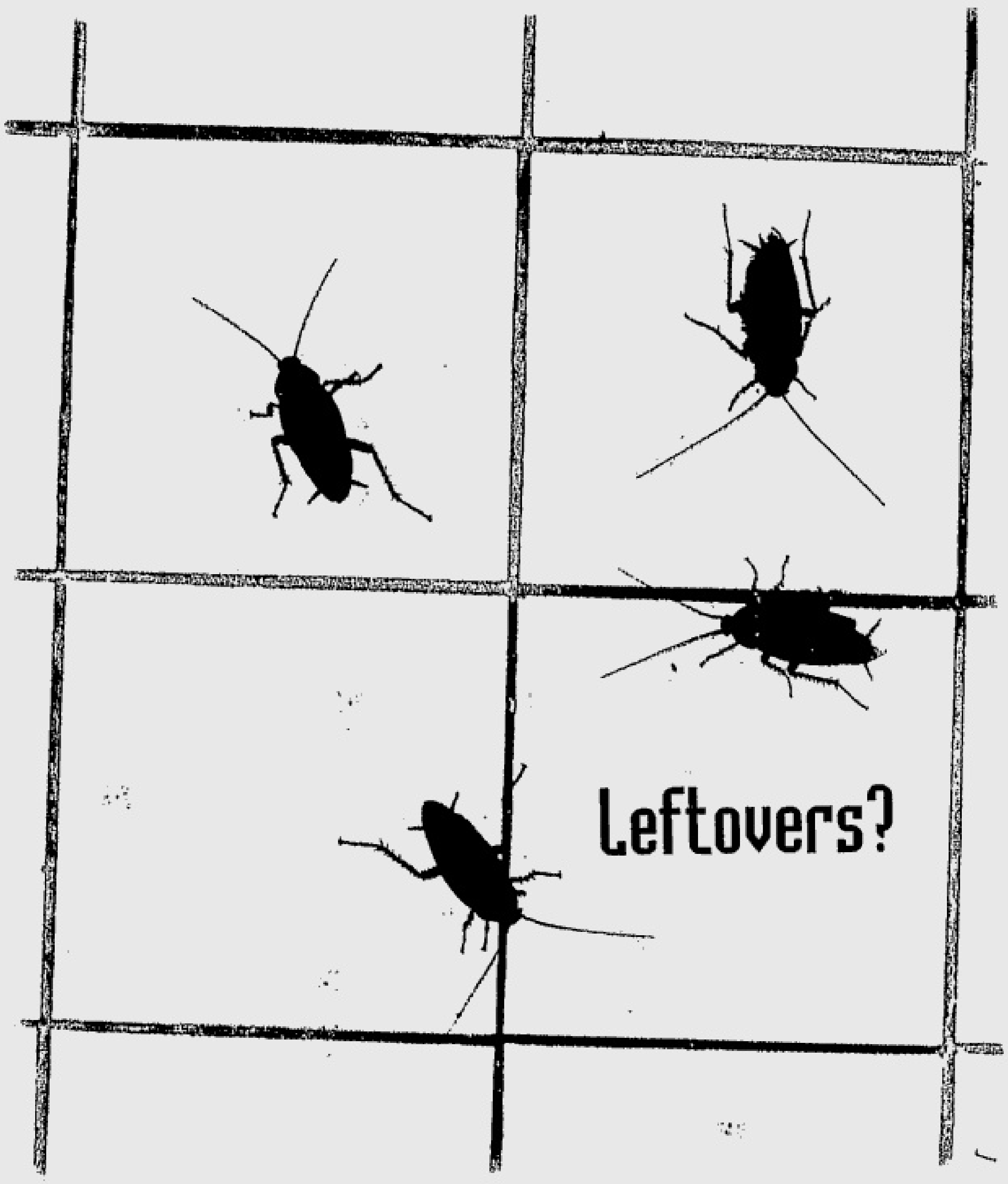
Pichay is a member of President Macapagal-Arroyo's campaign team.

Rep. Jacinto Paras (Lakas, Negros Oriental) said Maceda's float could have been "just sarcasm," meant to show that Ms Macapagal was such a weak candidate, even Roces could beat her.

Presidential campaign spokesperson Mike Defensor did not think so. Coming from Maceda, he said on television, the statement should not be taken lightly.

On the "bright" side, Nograles pointed out it was a "tacit admission" that even the opposition leaders were not sure of Poe's citizenship. "This (also) shows that they do not have a deep selection bench."

The Comelec is set to start hearings on the petition this week.



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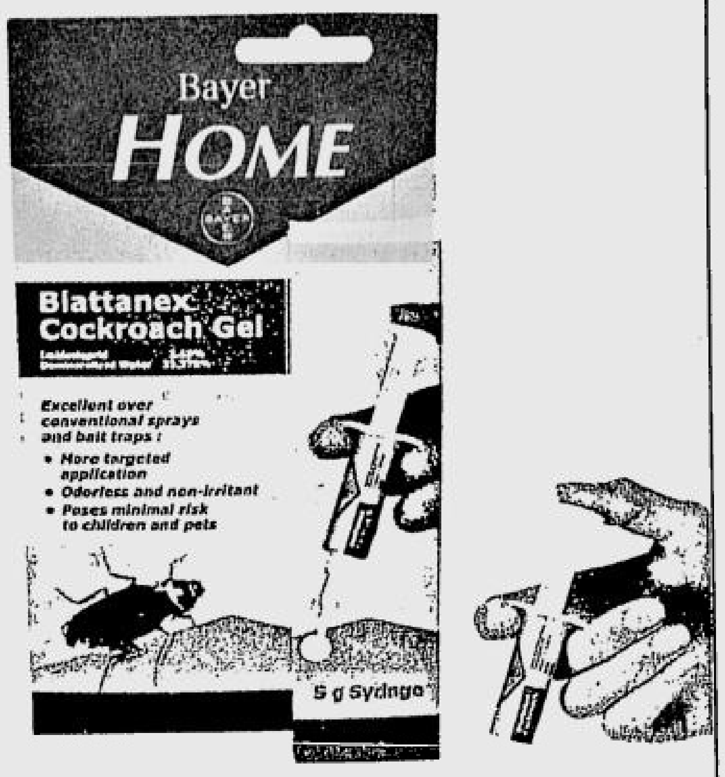
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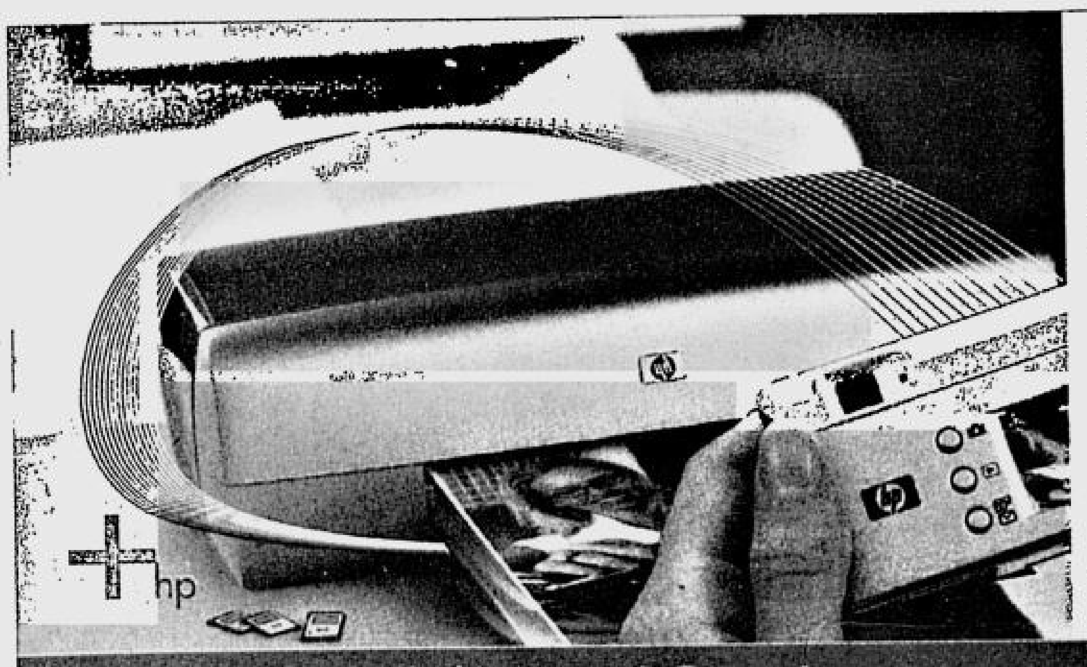

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FIGHTING TERRORISM

RP makes presence felt in Security Council debut

By Jerome Aning

THE PHILIPPINES yesterday has made its formal public debut in the United Nations Security Council by calling for a more targeted approach in the fight against international terrorism, particularly in the implementation of international sanctions against the al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Ambassador Lauro L. Baja Jr., Philippine permanent representative to the UN, made the call on Monday, New York time, in response to the report of his Chilean counterpart Heraldo Muñoz, chair of the Security Council committee that oversees the implementation of sanctions against the al-Qaida and the Taliban.

In his statement at the body's first public meeting this year, Baja joined other Council members in underscoring the vital need for international cooperation at all levels after Muñoz reported that only 93 of the 191 UN member-countries have so far complied with the requirements of SC Resolution 1455.

Resolution 1455, which the Council approved last year, requires member-countries to submit a comprehensive report on their compliance with the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo which the body earlier ordered against the al-Qaida and the Taliban under Resolution 1267.

"There is a need to be constantly vigilant in monitoring terrorists' operations," Baja said. "We should endeavor to highlight the vital importance of international cooperation at all levels, information exchange and greater coordination of states' actions in making the sanctions more effective," he added.

In calling for a more targeted approach in the fight against terrorism, Baja said the SC panel can benefit from the experience of Southeast Asia, which he described as "a fertile area for anyone wishing to understand post-9/11 al-Qaida planning, leadership and tactics."

Since the 9/11 attacks in the United States, Southeast Asia has seen a surge in the terrorist activities of the Jemaah Islamiyah, which is believed to have links with the al-Qaida network of Osama bin Laden.

Baja also backed the Muñoz panel's recognition of the need to provide technical assistance that would allow member-countries to implement antiterrorism measures more effectively. "Technical assistance could be in the form of capacity building on border security and in dismantling the financial networks of terrorists," he said. "Because of the ease of travel within Southeast Asia, terrorist groups have connected with each other in fluid and shifting combinations."

Baja also welcomed the plan of the panel to pursue dialogues not only with individual countries but also with other regional groups, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. He said the exchange of information brings down the barriers of distrust separating individual agencies and enables them to be aware of the extent and depth of the terrorist networks.

Although the Philippine delegation has been actively participating in meetings and consultations of the Security Council since the start of the year, today's meeting was Baja's first public appearance at the Council chamber since the Philippines assumed its seat as a non-permanent member.

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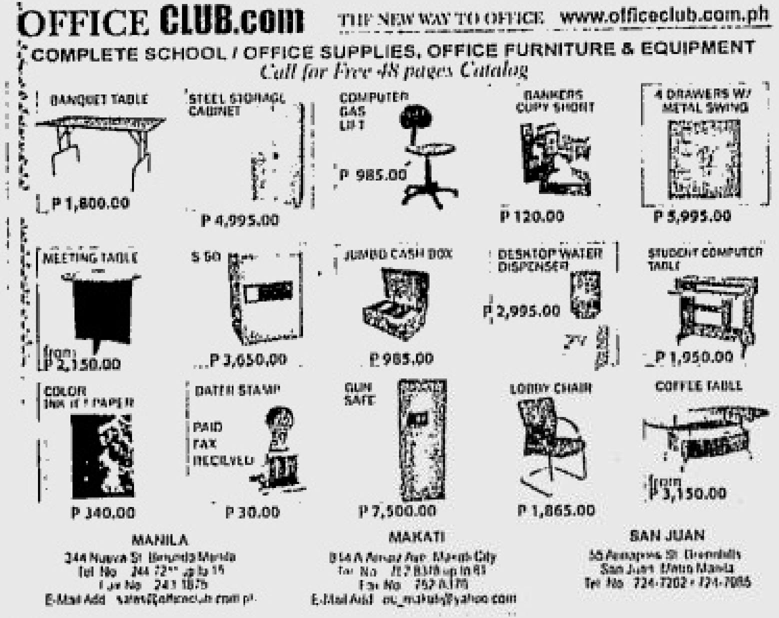
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Paracetamol tab 500 mg	✓ 0.75	2.45	1.70/tab
Anti-biotic (Kontra-Bakterya)			
Amoxicillin cap. 250 mg	✓ 3.10	8.95	5.85/cap
Amoxicillin cap. 500 mg	✓ 3.70	15.75	12.05/cap
Amoxicillin drops 125 mg/1.25 ml/10 ml	✓ 37.00	80.75	43.75/bot
Amoxicillin susp. 250 mg/5 ml, 60 ml	✓ 49.00	144.00	95.00/bot
Chloramphenicol cap. 500 mg	✓ 3.40	37.75	34.35/cap
Chloramphenicol susp. 125 mg/5 ml 60 ml	✓ 41.40	394.75	353.35/bot
Co-trimoxazole tab (TM-160mg SMZ-800mg)	✓ 2.30	26.00	23.70/tab
Co-trimoxazole cap. (TM-80mg SMZ-400mg)	✓ 2.60	14.80	12.20/cap
Co-trimoxazole susp. (TM-40mg SMZ-200mg)	✓ 25.00	115.75	90.75/bot
Anti-cough (Para sa Ubo)			
Bromhexine HCL syrup 4 mg/5 ml, 60 ml	✓ 26.70	74.75	48.05/bot
Carbocisteine cap. 500 mg	✓ 2.40	12.25	9.85/cap
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Ailing Doy eyes Con-con

By Volt Contreras

FORMER Vice President Salvador "Doy" Laurel is "responding very well" to chemotherapy at a US hospital and is looking forward to being elected to a Constitutional convention should the revived efforts to amend the 1987 Constitution push through, his lawyer told the INQUIRER yesterday.

The 75-year-old Laurel, who has been under treatment for lymphoma since August at the Stanford University Hospital in California, would be eager to campaign for a shift to a federalist, parliamentary form of government and a return to the two-party system, according to lawyer Jose Oliveros.

Facing a graft case at the Sandiganbayan over the controversial Centennial Expo project, Laurel obtained the court's permission last July to seek medical attention in the US for lymphoma.

Oliveros said his client's chemotherapy may take until late February. Accompanied by wife Celia, the former vice president has kept himself updated on Philippine current events, he added.

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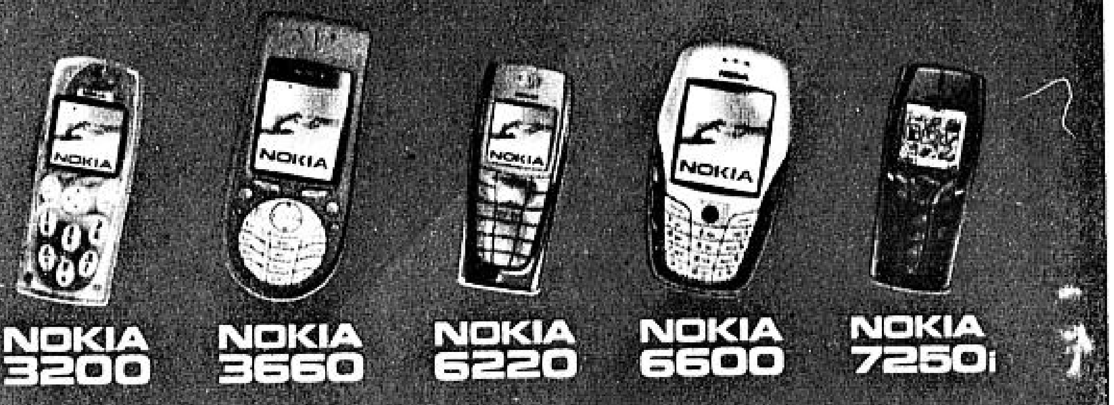

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It's back to manual count for Comelec

From page A1

Namfrel was originally behind automation because the manual mode proved to be more inconvenient and prone to cheating. "But the decision has been made and eliminated the guesswork," Namfrel national chair Jose Concepcion Jr. said.

Concepcion said the manual mode was characterized by cheating and death. "The challenge here is to remember the 1986 elections, preserve democracy, and cooperate with Namfrel as the watchdog."

Namfrel executive director Guillermo Luz said "it was a choice between two bad options: working with a new anomalous system or an old system with lots of risks."

In a statement, Namfrel said that "it may be more difficult and chaotic to amend the law to postpone elections beyond May 10" than to change plans.

Senators said there was enough time for the Comelec to prepare for the manual counting of votes and still hold the national elections as scheduled.

Don't appeal

Senate President Franklin Drilon urged the Comelec not to appeal the high court ruling and just prepare for the manual counting of votes so that the national elections could be held as scheduled.

"Otherwise, if they dilly-dally and time will run short, we will have problems," Drilon said.

While the House of Representatives was against postponing the elections, Speaker Jose de Venecia said the congressmen would rush a measure postponing the elections by 10 to 14 days "if absolutely necessary."

The other day, Tarlac Rep. Jesli Lapus filed a bill calling for the postponement of the elections due to lack of government assurance that the counting would proceed smoothly in case the Supreme Court voided the automation counting contract.

Lapus, head of the House panel in the joint congressional oversight committee on electoral modernization and absentee voting, said the committee would be immediately convened to discuss whether there was a need to postpone the elections.

"We don't know if the Supreme Court will still allow us to use the machines considering the circumstances behind the case," Lapus said at a press conference.

He said the timetable for the elections would be affected by the high court decision because the voting for seafarers and absentee voters had been scheduled earlier. "We'll have to sit down with Comelec to see whether they can do their task or not."

His counterpart in the Senate is Sen. Edgardo Angara, who said "there's enough time to go manual and there's no need to for extra appropriation."

Lapus said that while he believed that there was a need to hold the elections as scheduled, he doubted the Comelec's capability to ensure orderly manual counting due to time restraint as a result of the Supreme Court ruling.

Augusto Lagman, an information technology professional and member of Namfrel, said "Comelec can still postpone the elections until May 31."

Quoting former Comelec chair Christian Monsod, Lagman said the poll body had enough time—112 to 132 days—to prepare for manual elections. Lagman was among those who petitioned the Supreme Court to nullify the contract awarded to Mega Pacific eSolutions.

Automation still possible

Opposition senatorial candidates Juan Enrile and Didagen Dilangalen said the Comelec could still pursue automated elections.

Enrile said what was voided was the bidding and the award of the contract. "But there's nothing that will prevent the Comelec to use those machines in the next elections if it wants to do so, as long as the SC did not say or prohibit the use of those machines in the next elections."

Dilangalen, for his part, said that even if the SC voided the contract, the Comelec could still proceed with the automation.

"We have two laws right now mandating automation. The SC can't legislate manual counting. That is within the province of Congress. It may be that the contract is void, but we already have the facilities. It's all up to the Comelec now to continue with the automation," he said.

Dilangalen said criminal liability was a different matter. "For as long as they are there, Comelec officials, no criminal case can be filed against them because they are impeachable officials. They have to be impeached, but we have no time for the impeachment at this point in time."

He said nationwide automation could continue. "The issue is not whether or not the SC has voided the contract. The issue is do we have the facility to support automation? Yes, we have the facilities."

Deliberate

But presidential candidate Raul Roco said it was fine with him if the Comelec reverted to manual counting so long as it did not postpone the elections.

In an interview at the Bayan Muna national convention, Roco said postponing the elections was "unconstitutional, whimsical and capricious" on the Comelec's part. "It would unleash forces that will be difficult to predict."

He said he saw a "pattern" in the Comelec's actions supposedly favoring extending President Macapagal-Arroyo's stay in office. He noted how the Comelec had also botched up the implementation of the absentee voting law and the computerization program.

"Now they're using the inefficiency they themselves committed as an excuse to postpone (the elections). *Parang sinasadya* (They seem to be deliberately doing it)," Roco said.

Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. also put his foot down on proposals to postpone the elections, warning that a "political vacuum" will occur.

De Venecia pointed out that resetting the polls was an extreme option that should be resorted only if "absolutely necessary."

In an interview over radio station dzBB, De Venecia outlined the following scenario if the elections were pushed back by 10 days to May 20.

De Venecia said that a May 20 election would mean that Congress will also reset the canvassing. Under the Constitution, the two chambers of Congress have the sole power to canvass the results of a presidential election and proclaim the winner.

"We might finish the canvassing on July 5," De Venecia said. "But the Constitution says that all terms of office end on June 30 and that means we will have a political vacuum."

"Even us members of Congress will have our terms ending on June 30, meaning we're no longer congressmen after that time," he said.

Questionable integrity

Some quarters have warned that with a vacuum resulting from the postponement of the elections, military adventurers will have a convenient excuse to step in and grab power.

In the Senate, Sen. Joker Arroyo said the effect of that Supreme Court decision was that "we have a Comelec that could not enter into a contract that is plain and regular.

"Ergo, if it cannot enter into a good contract, how can we trust it now with overseeing the voting process of the country? Why? Because the SC decision actually questions its integrity."

Arroyo then said that a tainted body should not be be trusted with supervising elections.

He, however, favored the holding of elections as "we have no choice but to go with a damaged and tainted Comelec, and hope that, for all its incompetence we can still survive." *With reports from and Christine O. Avendaño, Carlito Pablo and INQ7.net*

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THE BUCK stops here: Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos has a lot of explaining to do.

'Abalos packaged P1.3-B contract'

From page A1

Comelec a total of 1,991 automated counting machines for use in the May polls.

Last November, Abalos was quoted by newsmen as saying the bids and awards panel had evaluated and was satisfied with the financial capability of the consortium as a whole, paying particular attention to the qualifications of SK C & C, the Korean partner which manufactured the vote-counting machines.

Yesterday, two of the seven complainants in the Supreme Court case hailed the high court's decision, calling it "a victory for the Filipino people."

"My faith in the country's justice system has been restored," said Ma. Corazon Akol, now president of Japanese IT Standards Examination of the Philippines Foundation Inc. or Jitse-Phil.

Akol is also a former member of the Comelec advisory council for the poll body's modernization program.

For his part, Augusto Lagman, a former president of the foundation, said he had "every reason to very happy because a very terrible wrong has been corrected."

"This just proves that a very small group of ordinary but determined citizens can make a difference in this country," Lagman told the INQUIRER.

Both Akol and Lagman recalled that "when we filed the case, it was like *suntok sa buwan* (shooting for the moon)."

"Some people were saying then it's an exercise in futility, but we didn't give up. Later, during the oral arguments it's clear we won," Akol said.

She also cited their lawyer Antonio Pastelero for doing a "good job."

"We had no vested interests. We happen to know IT and elections. This is one case which shows the reason corruption thrives here is because we allow it. We chose not to allow it so we questioned (the Mega Pacific contract)," according to Akol.

"Obviously," Akol said yesterday, "we're on cloud nine."

Cynthia Mamon, president of the Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines, said the decision was "a victory of truth." *With a report from Martin Marfil*

What now? Poll body confused

From page A1

Comelec executives who admitted they were surprised by the decision.

"If the contract was voided, are we going to hold another bidding? It will take us at least six months and the company will need several months more for manufacturing," a Comelec director said.

Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos said the contract had been paid in full but he refused to speculate on whether the decision would affect the manner of elections. Whether it would be automated or manual.

Presidential candidate Raul Roco and Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan called for the resignation of Comelec officials.

"The whole commission should resign and bow their heads in shame," Roco said in a statement.

He urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to replace them with "experienced lawyers or public accountants or computer experts" as soon as possible.

"Persons of known probity and experience, if necessary, should be conscripted into the public service for the 2004 elections," he said.

Roco, president of the Aksyon Demokratiko party, also urged other the political parties to submit their recommendations to Malacañang so that the elections would not be delayed.

Noting that the Comelec officials were impeachable officials, Pangilinan told reporters that the poll officials should contemplate resigning so that the image of the Comelec as an institution could be spared from further damage.

A Comelec official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the bidding for the counting machines was aboveboard. Of the two bidders, one offered a bid of P3.3 billion and the other P1.3 billion.

"Of course we went for the lower bid... It didn't matter if the consortium was new as long as one of its members had been in the business for a long time,' 'the official said.

The bidding for the Comelec automated counting machines was conducted in July 2002 and won by the Mega Pacific consortium. The losing bidder was the Total Information Management Corp. (TIM).

At that time, the bids and awards committee was composed of Comelec finance manager Eduardo Mejos, who acted as chair; Comelec assistant finance manager Gideon de Guzman, who was the vice chair; Comelec legal department head Jose Balbuena, who is on leave; Comelec planning chief Lamberto Llamas; and Election and barangay affairs division chief Bartolome Sinocruz.

They were supported by a technical group headed by Comelec administrative services chief Jose Tolentino and the group had employees from the Department of Science and Technology as members to check the specifications.

The BAC then made recommendations for the commission en banc regarding the bidding.

"Everything was aboveboard. Our concern was for a company which can deliver. They (Mega) were able to deliver and its working," the official said.

Phase II

On April 15, 2003, the Comelec awarded the contract for Phase II of the project to Mega Pacific consortium through Resolution No. 6074.

In the resolution, Commissioner Mehol Sadain issued a memorandum saying that he would have preferred to register his vote after submission of the BAC report.

Yesterday, Abalos maintained that the bidding was aboveboard. "As far as we are concerned, we maintain that what we have done is legal, what we have done is regular," he said at a press briefing shortly after news of the SC decision spread.

At the briefing, Abalos revealed that he had heard that a decision voiding the contract was already known at least a month ago.

The Comelec chief said that even as the rumors spread around on Dec. 24, poll officials were asked by the Supreme Court to submit documents on Dec. 26.

Surprised

"I didn't want to believe (that the Supreme Court already had a decision)... I'm surprised *ba't nagkaganoon* (why this happened)," he said when asked if he felt that the Comelec was being fooled by the high court.

Despite this, Abalos said the Comelec would hold the elections "as mandated by law".

"The Comelec will proceed with the elections as mandated by law, which means May 10. But we will come out with a policy tomorrow after having received a copy of the decision, studying everything there, what is so stated in the decision," he said. *With a report from Dona Pazzibugan and Christine O. Avendaño*

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Palace denies purge of JIL

MALACAÑANG firmly denied yesterday speculations that President Macapagal-Arroyo had ordered a purge of government-appointed officials affiliated with the Jesus Is Lord movement led by Bro. Eddie Villanueva.

The religious leader earlier spurned Ms Macapagal's appeal for support in her bid for a fresh term. Instead, he joined the presidential race.

His son, Cong. Joel Villanueva, told the INQUIRER of persistent talk that National Telecommunications Commission Chair Armi Jane Borje, the lone JIL member in the President's Cabinet, would be replaced soon.

The solon said the group was inclined to believe that this was a "natural backlash" of traditional politics, in which public officials, no matter how qualified, were kicked out on account of certain affiliations. "This is precisely the reason that my father decided to run for President," he pointed out.

Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo insisted he knew of no such plan to remove government appointees backed by the influential JIL leader.

The telecommunications industry has been abuzz with rumors that Borje was getting the ax because of her association with Villanueva, and that she would be replaced by a lawyer whose firm holds office at the LTA Building in Makati.*Gil Cabacungan Jr.*

CANDIDATES LIST

Brother Eddie is in

By Martin P. Marfil

EVANGELIST Bro. Eddie Villanueva of Bangon Pilipinas was finally included by the Commission on Elections yesterday in its list of qualified presidential aspirants.

The decision to include Villanueva, spiritual leader of the Jesus is Lord movement, was issued by the Comelec after its en banc meeting yesterday where they discussed those who are qualified to run for the presidency.

Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos said they decided to allow only six aspirants to run for the presidency in the May elections from a total of 84 presidential aspirants who filed their certificates of candidacy.

The six qualified presidential aspirants are President Macapagal-Arroyo, Sen. Raul Roco, Sen. Panfilo Lacson, actor Fernando Poe Jr., Villanueva and businessman Eddie Gil.

"He is going to run as an independent candidate and maybe his movement, in the event that it is not registered as a political party, could back him up as a movement, but not as a political party," Comelec Commissioner Mejol Sadain said.

Although Villanueva has hurdled one of his obstacles, the JIL leader still has to face the disqualification case filed against him and the problem of accreditation of his political party, Bangon Pilipinas.

Villanueva, a former staunch supporter of Ms Macapagal, earlier decided to run for the highest post in the land despite the opposition of Malacañang which feared that his candidacy would split the administration votes.

Villanueva has strongly suspected that Malacañang was behind moves to disqualify him.

The Comelec's law department earlier made a study saying that only five of the 84 presidential candidates were qualified.

The list did not include Villanueva whom lawyers said did not have a political party unlike Gil who had an accredited party, the Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa party.

Gil, Sadain said, had a complete national slate and even has some local bets.

In the vice presidential race, four candidates—Sen. Loren Legarda, Sen. Noli de Castro, former Rep. Herminio Aquino and Gil's running mate Rodolfo Pajo—were deemed qualified by the Comelec while in the Senate race, 63 were allowed to run.

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The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

NEW ASIAN HEALTH SCARE

Bird flu kills 3 in Vietnam

HANOI—Asia faced a new health scare on Tuesday after three Vietnamese died from "bird flu," but the WHO said there were no signs yet an outbreak that had ravaged the region's poultry industry was spreading between people.

"The evidence to date is that there is no sign of human-to-human transmission," Dr. Shigeru Omi of the World Health Organization said in a statement.

But Omi said the consequences would be dire if the virus latched on to the human influenza virus and spread among people, who have little immune protection against the strain.

"The ensuing virus would then be highly pathogenic and transmissible," said Omi, the WHO regional director for the Western Pacific.

In a region already alarmed by the return of SARS, health officials say they are worried by the rapid spread of H5N1 avian influenza, or bird flu, in Japan, South Korean and Vietnam.

The WHO said tests conducted by a Hong Kong laboratory confirmed that bird flu killed one adult and two children from the Hanoi area.

They were among 14 people who fell ill with influenza in Hanoi and surrounding provinces. Eleven of the 13 children and the mother of one of the children died.

Omi said there was no evidence so far linking the remaining cases to the flu virus that has killed nearly one million chickens in Vietnam. But investigators are exploring the possibility they were exposed to the same poultry.

The H5N1 avian flu virus spreads rapidly among poultry but rarely infects humans. Six people died in Hong Kong in 1997 during an outbreak of avian influenza and last year it infected a father and son in the crowded city.

Hanoi declared last week that it had been struck by a fast-spreading bird flu that has hit other countries in Asia, which has a vast poultry industry.

South Korea, which has already culled nearly two million chickens and ducks, reported its first new case of avian flu in more than a week on Tuesday, dashing hopes the outbreak was subsiding.

Hundreds of people living in affected areas have been given blood tests, although a health official said on Tuesday no one had shown symptoms of the disease.

In Japan, where the first bird flu outbreak in years was reported on Monday, the government vowed to protect consumers already worried about the safety of beef, fish and eggs.

"I am very worried. When I bought my lunch today, I avoided chicken," said computer worker Masako Kuramoto, 49, as she emerged from a supermarket in central Tokyo. *Reuters*

A THAI worker collects dead chickens for destruction at a farm in Chachoengsao province, 60 km east of the capital Bangkok. Thailand, one of the world's biggest chicken producers, is free of bird flu but is battling an outbreak of cholera in its poultry industry. REUTERS

Hong Kong halts poultry imports from 3 countries

HONG KONG—Hong Kong has imposed temporary bans of poultry imports from Japan, South Korea and Vietnam following an outbreak of bird flu that has killed thousands of chickens and ducks, an official said Tuesday.

Sally Kong, a spokesperson for the Bureau of Health, Welfare and Food, said the bans were imposed after the virus emerged in some parts of Asia.

Another bureau spokesperson, Sam Hui, said the ban against Japanese poultry was imposed on Tuesday, while the ban against South Korea took effect from Dec. 15.

Although Vietnam hasn't exported poultry to Hong Kong since 2000, a ban has been placed since Jan. 9 to bar any new imports from the country, he said.

The bans came after thousands of chickens died of the virus Tuesday in South Korea, where an outbreak last month led to the slaughter of 1.1 million chickens and ducks in an attempt to contain the disease.

In Japan, officials said 6,000 chickens had died from the bird flu and thousands of others would be slaughtered.

Vietnam has also reported cases of the disease, and health officials suspect that the flu may have been transmitted to humans. Hong Kong does not import chickens from Vietnam.

Hong Kong has been watchful for any outbreaks of bird flu since a strain in 1997 crossed over from poultry to humans, prompting the government to slaughter 1.4 million chickens to eradicate the disease.

Since then, it has imposed measures improving hygiene in the territory's markets that sell live poultry and vaccinating chickens against the virus. *AP*

China denies rumors of new suspected SARS case

BEIJING—China debunked rumors on Tuesday that a sick man in the southern boomtown of Shenzhen was a possible SARS case, but a Hong television report said one of two earlier suspected had been confirmed as having the deadly virus.

Shenzhen garment trader Chen Xiaohe, 38, had SARS-like symptoms a month ago, but doctors determined he was suffering from a form of bacterial pneumonia, Xinhua news agency said.

The Xinhua comment came as Asia faced a new health scare in bird flu, with the World Health Organization confirming that the disease had killed three people in Vietnam.

Chen was put into intensive care on Jan. 10 for "respiratory distress, coupled with other symptoms such as pneumonia, respiratory failure and failure of other organs in the chest," the agency said. His condition was now under control.

"Shenzhen City has strictly followed the requirements for reporting set by the World Health Organization," Zhou Jun'an, head of the health bureau of Shenzhen City, was quoted as saying. "There has been no confirmed or suspected SARS case in Shenzhen since winter."

Shenzhen is a special economic zone surrounded by Guangdong and the former British colony of Hong Kong.

In Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong about 90 km northwest of Shenzhen, a 20-year-old waitress had been confirmed as having SARS, Hong Kong Cable Television said, the country's second confirmed case of the deadly disease in just over a week.

The television station quoted sources from China's health ministry as saying a formal announcement would be made later.

Last week China confirmed its first SARS case since the WHO declared an end to the last outbreak in July. That victim has now recovered and left hospital.

On Monday, China reported a third suspected case of SARS in a 35-year-old investor in Guangzhou. *Reuters*

WORLDBRIEFS

Chavez to resign if he loses in recall

CARACAS, Venezuela—President Hugo Chavez promised to leave office if he lost a recall referendum on his rule—but he warned election authorities could lose the public's trust if they approved a petition he insisted was fraudulent. "If I lose a referendum... I'll leave," Chavez said, in an unusual interview for Monday's edition of the opposition-aligned El Universal newspaper. "Well-informed Venezuelans, even adversaries, know I'm no tyrant." Chavez insisted opposition leaders used widespread fraud to collect more than 3.4 million signatures to demand the referendum. *AP*

Tortured China official kills self

SHANGHAI, China—A former deputy mayor of a major Chinese city who said he was tortured into confessing to corruption killed himself by jumping from a prison building, according to state media and a human rights monitoring center. Zhu Shengwen, 56, died on Dec. 29 at a prison in China's northeast as it was preparing to release him on medical parole, newspapers and the Xinhua News Agency said Tuesday. They said Zhu had become depressed last December and was receiving counseling, but his wife reportedly said he was calm and looked forward to his release. *AP*

HK seer jailed for conning woman

HONG KONG—A sweet-talking fortune teller who tricked a lovelorn woman into having sex with him and blackmailed her with secretly filmed footage has been jailed for 4 1/2 years in Hong Kong, newspapers reported Tuesday. The District Court convicted Keung Chi-wai on Monday on 10 charges, including procuring another person for an unlawful sexual act by false pretenses and threats, criminal intimidation and blackmail, the reports said. The victim, 22, earlier told the court that she believed Keung, 46, when he claimed that if she had sex with him that her relationship with her boyfriend would improve, the Chinese-language Apple Daily reported. District Court Deputy Judge Ernest Lin said Keung "took advantage of her vulnerability and used sweet words to make her believe that you... could help her win her boyfriend's heart," the South China Morning Post reported. She went to the police when the self-proclaimed fortune teller and palm reader demanded more sex and threatened to expose the tape of their trysts, the Post reported. *AP*

Husband killer gets death

LOS ANGELES—A woman who killed her husband by putting a poisonous oleander plant in his food and spiking his sports drink with antifreeze was sentenced to death on Monday. Jurors found Angelina Rodriguez, 35, guilty in October of murdering her husband, Frank, in 2000 to get his $250,000 life insurance. Prosecutors believe Rodriguez put enough poisonous oleander in her husband's meals to send him to the hospital and then killed him at home by lacing Gatorade with antifreeze. She is also under investigation for the 1993 death of her 13-month-old infant daughter, who died after swallowing part of a pacifier, said Deputy District Attorney Doug Sortino. *AP*

Condom-in-soup suit settled

SANTA ANA, California—Four women have resolved their lawsuit against a restaurant where one of them allegedly found a condom in her clam chowder, attorneys said. The women had sued McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant, claiming negligence and intentional infliction of emotional distress after one bit into an unwrapped, rolled-up condom on Feb. 26, 2002. The case was scheduled to begin Monday in Orange County Superior Court but was canceled after the two sides reached a resolution. Details were not released. *AP*

Iran gov't threatens to quit over election crisis

TEHRAN—Iran's reformist government has threatened to resign amid denunciations on Tuesday of hardliners for disqualifying candidates for next month's elections who are allied with the reformist president.

In a deepening of the nation's political crisis, the official Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Vice President Mohammad Sattarifar as saying late Monday that "if the government feels that it can't fulfill its responsibilities in protecting legitimate freedoms, such as defending the rights of the nation for a free and fair elections, then it does not believe that there is any reason to stay in power."

The statement is the strongest yet indicating President Mohammad Khatami's government may be willing to resign if it cannot ensure fair elections. However, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has pledged to intervene if the crisis is not resolved soon.

The Guardian Council, an unelected hardline constitutional watchdog, has barred over 3,000 of the 8,200 people—including more than 80 sitting lawmakers—who filed papers to run for a seat in the 290-member parliament. Lawmakers have said all of those disqualified were reformists.

State broadcast media controlled by hardliners have said the candidates were disqualified because they lacked "the necessary legal qualifications."

The move has provoked international criticism as well, with the United States urging the Iranian government to oppose any interference in the electoral process.

"We would note that a government's handling of the electoral process is one of the fundamental measurements of its credibility," US state department deputy spokesperson Adam Ereli said Monday in Washington.

The European Union's foreign policy chief also warned the elections would not be credible unless the disqualifications were reversed. It would be "difficult to explain (to the European parliament) how a lawmaker can't be a candidate," Javier Solana said during a visit to Tehran to discuss Iran's relations with Europe.

Iran's largest reformist party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front said in a statement made available on Tuesday to The Associated Press that disqualifying the reform candidates amounted to treason because it damaged Iran's international credibility and would result in "sham elections."

"We consider the disqualifications national treason and an attempt to transform the Islamic Republic into a despotic establishment," the party said in its statement. "Disqualifications deny the people their constitutional right to choose and be chosen . . . Hardliners seek to set up a sham parliament through sham elections."

Reformists have threatened a boycott of the Feb. 20 polls if disqualifications are not reversed. Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters, said Monday he would intervene only once all legal channels were exhausted. *AP*

4 killed in explosion at Singapore ad office

SINGAPORE—Four people were killed in an explosion Tuesday at a Singapore design and advertising office in what appeared to be an industrial mishap, police and fire officials said.

Officials said there were no indications the explosion was terrorism-related.

The blast occurred at 11:40 a.m. (0340 GMT) on the second floor of a seven-floor factory building that houses offices and shops, police spokesperson Rachel Yeo said.

Two people were injured, including one who jumped from the second-floor office to escape the flames, Singapore Civil Defense Force spokesperson Subhas Nadarajan told reporters at the scene.

Police said at one point that five people died in the fire, but later revised the toll to four dead.

"Four casualties were found inside," Nadarajan said.

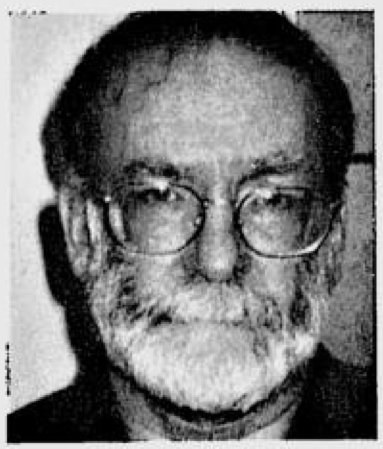
Traces of paint solvent found inside the office pointed to "an industrial mishap" as the cause of the fire, Nadarajan said.

Gurpal Singh, who runs a printing business on the seventh floor, said the explosion shook the building like "a loud thunderstorm," and that smoke quickly spread to the floors above.

Firefighters extinguished the fire within 20 minutes, Nadarajan said.

The building is Singapore's Toa Payoh area, home to many electronics manufacturing plants. *AP*

A SINGAPOREAN investigator studies the debris outside a building where a vapor explosion on Tuesday left four people dead. AP



SHIPMAN REUTERS

'Dr. Death' serial killer found dead inside cell

LONDON—Britain's worst mass murderer Harold Shipman—a family doctor who killed hundreds of his patients—was found hanging dead in his cell on Tuesday, the prison service said.

Shipman, nicknamed "Dr. Death" after his horrific killing spree came to light, was convicted in 2000 of murdering 15 of his patients and sentenced to life in prison. An inquiry later ruled he had murdered at least 215 of his patients with heroin injections, making him Britain's—and one of the world's—most prolific serial killer.

"He was found dead, hanging in his cell," a prison service spokesperson said. "Doctors have confirmed his death."

Shipman killed his patients, one by one, over a more than 20-year period from 1975 to 1998. Of his victims, 171 were female and 44 male. The oldest victim was a 93-year-old woman and the youngest a man of 41.

A statement from Wakefield prison, where Shipman had been held, said he was found at 0620 GMT on Tuesday, the day before his 58th birthday. "Despite the best efforts of staff who immediately attempted resuscitation, he was pronounced dead by a doctor at 8:10 a.m. (0810 GMT)," it said.

The official inquiry into the murders found that Shipman had murdered his victims quietly, coldly and systematically, ending the life of patient after patient in a betrayal of trust "unparalleled in history."

His motives remain a mystery and he had consistently refused to confess to any of them. *Reuters*

No antiterror sanctions in 100 countries

UNITED NATIONS—Nearly 100 countries have failed to enforce UN sanctions against the al-Qaida terror network and Afghanistan's ousted Taliban and they should be publicly identified, the chair of the committee overseeing sanctions said.

Heraldo Munoz, the Chilean ambassador to the United Nations, briefed the Security Council on Monday on the committee's uphill struggle to implement the asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo.

Only 93 countries have submitted reports on measures being taken to implement sanctions—less than half the 191 UN member states, he said.

Muñoz said possible reasons for the failure to comply with the requirement to submit reports included lack of political will, "reporting fatigue," lack of resources and technical ability, and problems with national coordination.

The committee "intends to analyze and address the issue of why some states did not submit reports," he said. "I also feel that these states should be identified for their non-compliance with the Security Council resolutions."

Muñoz said it wasn't just a matter of "naming and shaming," but of closing loopholes, adopting tougher measures, and engaging directly with countries to tell them that compliance with the sanctions resolution is mandatory.

Chile, the United States and Russia are also working on a new resolution to strengthen sanctions which is expected to be adopted this month.

"You can expect stronger measures" and possibly new sanctions, Muñoz said.

The council shifted sanctions from the government of Afghanistan to terror leader Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida and remnants of the Taliban in January 2002, after a US-led force ousted the Taliban. But while 4,000 individuals linked to the two groups have been detained in over 102 countries, the UN list of individuals and entities subject to sanctions has only 392 names.

Algeria's UN Ambassador Abdallah Baali, a new council member, suggested that countries might not be providing names for the UN list because of the reluctance of council members to accept their evidence of links with al-Qaida or the Taliban and called for greater transparency in the committee's operation. *AP*

ADDRESS TO AMBASSADORS
Pope John Paul II greets Iraq's Charge d'Affaires to the Vatican Al-Anbari Abdul Amir after delivering his annual address to ambassadors to the Holy See at the Vatican on Jan. 12. The 83-year-old Pontiff on Monday urged all countries to reject links to terrorism and said Iraq was now rid of an oppressive regime. AP

Cardinal endorses condoms to counter AIDS

THE HAGUE—Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels, a top cleric seen as a candidate to succeed Pope John Paul II, has said he would accept the use of condoms in order to counter the spread of AIDS.

"When an HIV-positive person says to his partner, 'I want to have sexual relations,' he must use a condom," the cardinal said on a religious talk show broadcast on Saturday on Dutch public television.

He said that sex with a person infected with HIV, the virus which causes full-blown AIDS, should be avoided. "But if it should take place, the person must use a condom in order not to disobey the commandment condemning murder, in addition to breaking the commandment which forbids adultery."

Danneels' comments go against the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, which condemns artificial forms of birth control including condoms.

"Protecting oneself against sickness or death is an act of prevention," he argued. "Morally, it cannot be judged on the same level as when a condom is used to reduce the number of births."

The 70-year-old Danneels, who is also archbishop of Brussels, spoke out last September in favor of appointing women to the Roman Catholic clergy.

The outspoken cleric argued at the time that although "today the power structure within the church is male," it could evolve to include women.

He has said that Catholic bishops should be pragmatic in their interpretation of church rules and doctrine.

In India, meanwhile, Roman Catholic bishops have asked the federal government to make HIV and AIDS tests compulsory before granting marriage licenses to help prevent the spread of the deadly disease.

Bishop Yoohanan Chrysostom said the Church had called for the requirement to stop people transmitting the disease to their future marriage partners and to reduce the number of people becoming infected.

It would also prevent people who are unaware they have HIV/AIDS from passing it on.

He said in the absence of national legislation, the Church was planning to annul marriages in which a partner had been deceived by another who contracted HIV/AIDS before marriage.

"But the efforts of the Church would be strengthened only if appropriate legislation is enacted by the government," said a statement released Monday night by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

India's health ministry says about 4.58 million people, about 0.8 percent of India's adult population, have the HIV virus. The government gives no figures on the number of infected children. *AFP*

More days needed to get Spirit rolling

PASADENA, California—Nasa's Spirit rover has been on Mars for more than a week but still hasn't landed.

Instead, the six-wheeled vehicle sits parked 40 cm above the dirt and rocks of a planet it traveled more than 480 million km to explore. Its wheels have yet to touch down on the surface.

The sequence of maneuvers needed to get the rover to roll into action has taken longer and proved more complex than expected. And the air bags that cushioned the rover's landing on Mars have been obstructing the vehicle's path, despite repeated efforts to pull them back.

As a result, the rover will probably not set its wheels down on the martian soil until Wednesday or Thursday, at least 12 days after its arrival on Mars. That is a week longer than Nasa anticipated at launch.

Scientists on Monday released the first 360-degree, color panorama of the terrain the rover should roll onto this week.

The panorama, assembled from 225 separate images, shows a landscape that is pancake flat in some directions and rolling in others. The topography appears dominated by mounds of material cast off when asteroids or comets pummeled the martian surface in the distant past, punching out craters.

"The whole panorama is there before us. It's a great opening for the next stage in our mission, which is getting off the lander and out into this field," said Michael Malin, a member of the mission science team.

But the delays have caused much teeth-gnashing among mission members.

"The timing is a sign of the complexity and the complexity is the concern," said Richard Cook, deputy project manager of the $820 million double rover mission. *AP*

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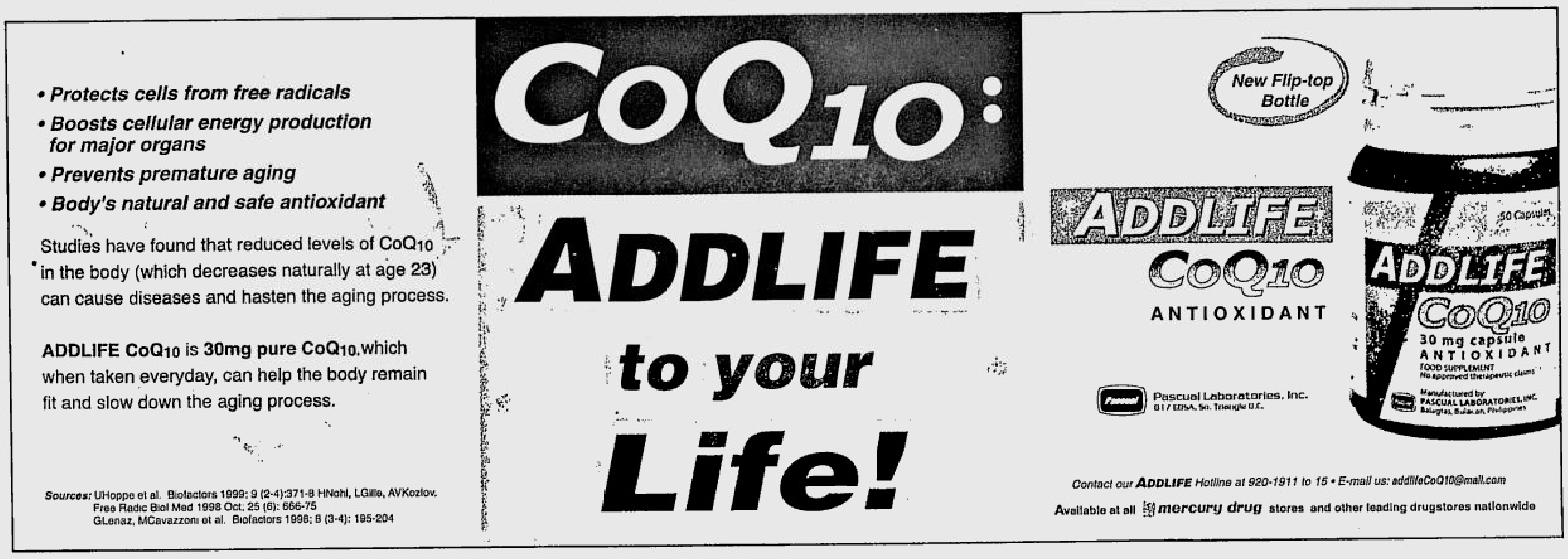
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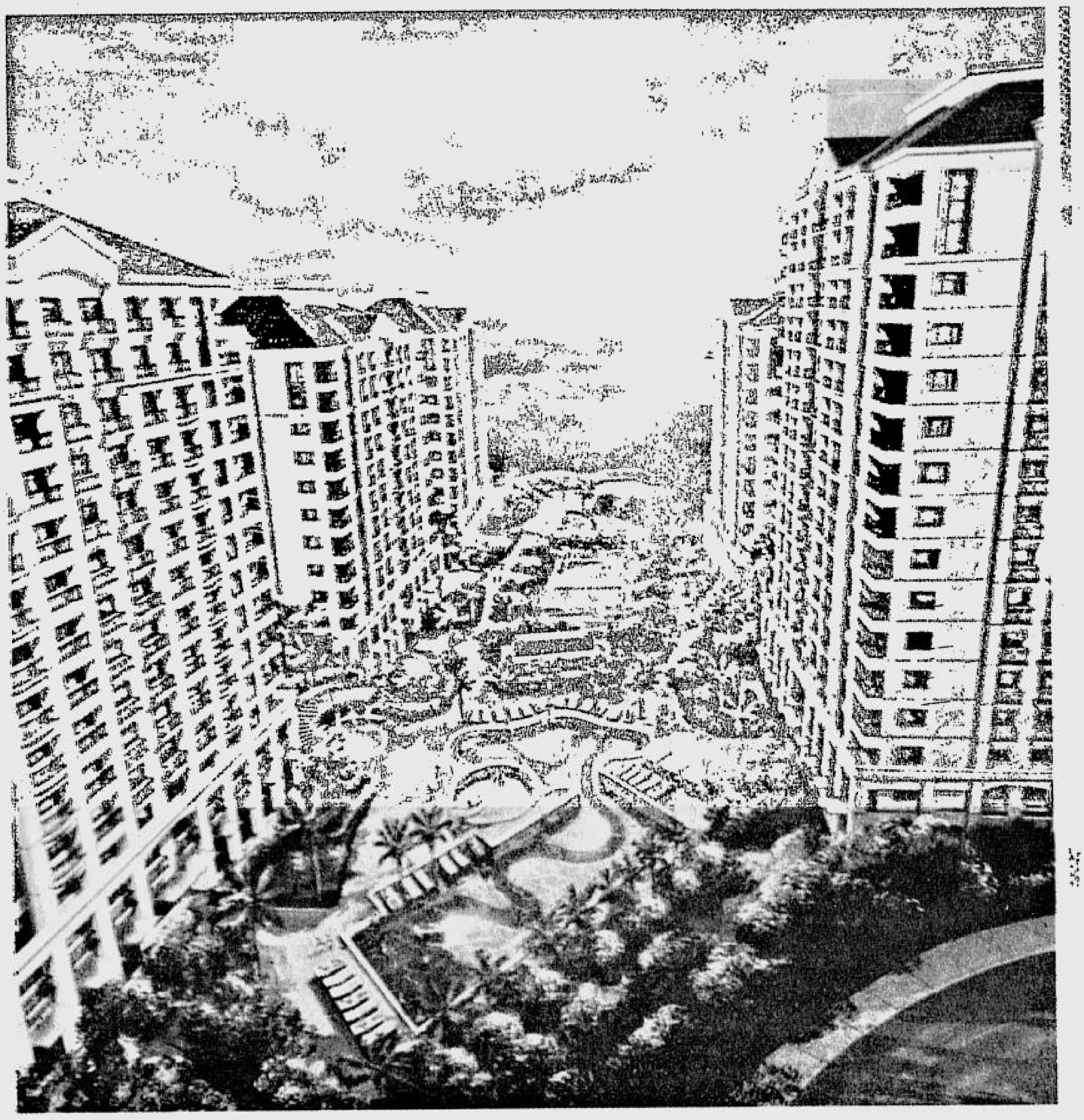
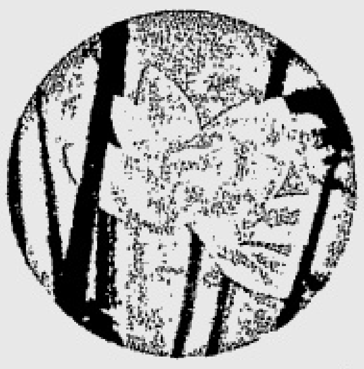


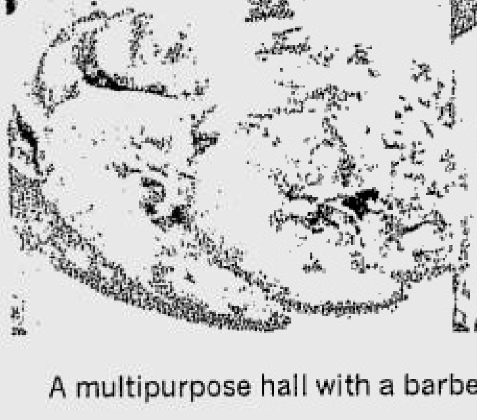
Forbeswood Heights
Your very own Paradise...

Emerging as one of the most coveted pieces of real estate in the country, Forbeswood Heights transforms home into a tropical getaway. Offering a paradise-like setting in the middle of the metropolis, this six-tower enclave achieves comfort and style through a balance of thoughtfully planned elements. For urban professionals based in the nearby Makati and even Ortigas central business districts, Forbeswood Heights offers exquisite residences combined with first-rate recreational amenities.



From executive studios to one-bedroom suites that range from 36 to 59 square meters, Forbeswood Heights redefines the concept of owning a luxury home. Units can be joined to suit a client's space requirements. Rooms are airy and bright. The layout is luxurious yet uncomplicated. And with its affordable prices and flexible payment terms, one easily lays claim to an address and a lifestyle of exceptional prestige.

At Forbeswood Heights, today's urban pacesetters reward themselves with exclusive access to their own tropical paradise. This condominium project brings the outdoors indoors with its 5,500-square-meter central park, an extensive recreational area embraced by lush greenery. There is a swimming pool complex with a 25-meter-long lap pool, a free-form pool with in-water lounge and a children's wading pool with water slide. By the pool deck is an inviting sunbathing lounge.



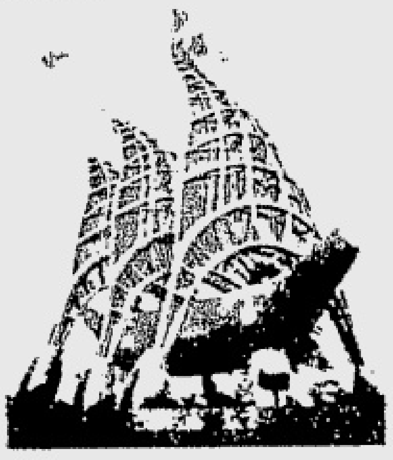
A multipurpose hall with a barbecue pit hosts a variety of functions. A fitness station, jogging path, tennis court and putting green provide challenging workouts. A playground enfolded by palm trees and landscaped gardens allows children to frolic to their hearts' content.

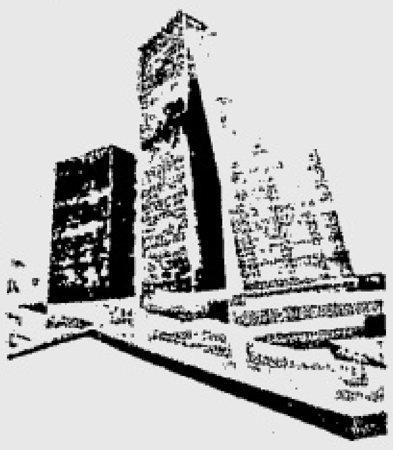
Beyond the gates lies Forbes Town Road, a leisure strip that echoes Singapore's Bugis Junction. With rows of cafés, restaurants, bars and specialty shops a few paces away, everyday celebrations are just waiting to happen.

…Nestled amid the best of a Global City

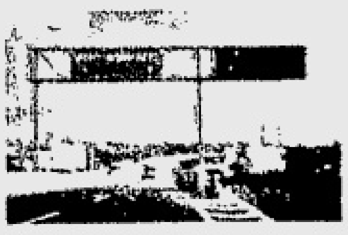
Forbeswood Heights lies within the Global City, a world-class business district, and is located right next to the country's foremost symbols of distinction: the Manila Golf and Country Club, the Manila Polo Club and the Forbes Park subdivision. This illustrious neighborhood, one of the city's main attractions, allows residents to live at the height of prominence.

Nearly half of the Global City's land is devoted to open space and greenery. Urban professionals, used to the sight of skyscrapers and cramped roads, will find this place a refreshing change. Also dotting this city of green are striking works of public art created by top Filipino artists such as Gerry Leonardo and Lor Calma.



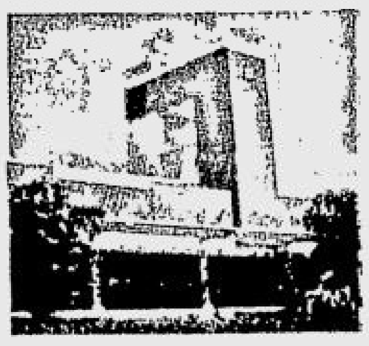


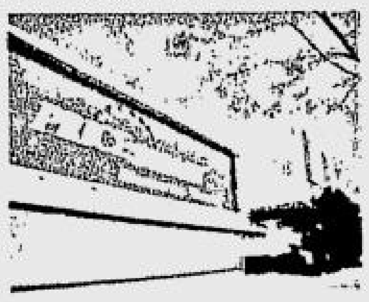
Much of the Global City's infrastructure has been laid underground. Its world-class dual piping, power and LPG supply and fiber optic cabling systems ensure the utmost convenience for its residents. Its drainage detention center, the largest private drainage structure in Metro Manila, guarantees that the city remains flood-free during the rainy season.

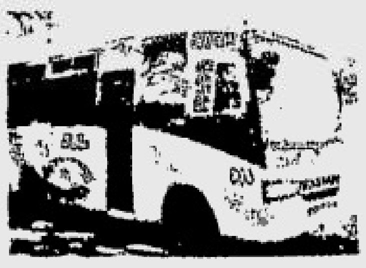


Well-situated amenities within the city such as PriceSmart and MC Home Depot make the daily essentials readily available to residents. The British School Manila, the Manila Japanese School and the International School Manila offer the youth a privileged education. The upcoming St. Luke's Medical Center brings expert health care closer to home.

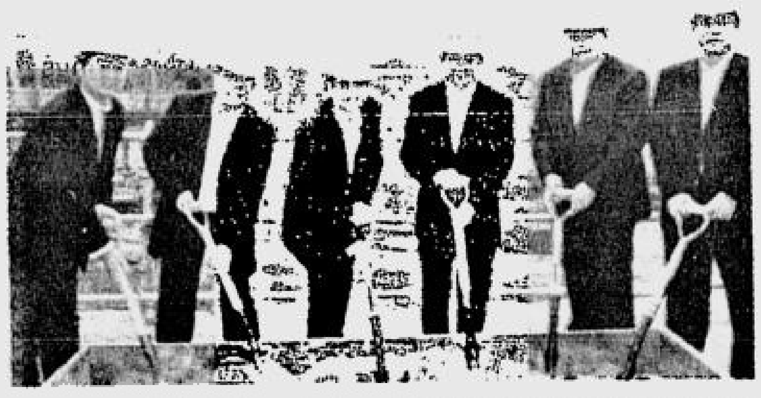
With the Global City's mass transport system, efficient road network and state-of-the-art traffic services, key destinations become easily accessible. The Makati and Ortigas CBDs can be reached effortlessly via the EDSA Kalayaan Flyover, the South Luzon Expressway and the Circumferential Road (C-5).







Transforming the Urban Landscape

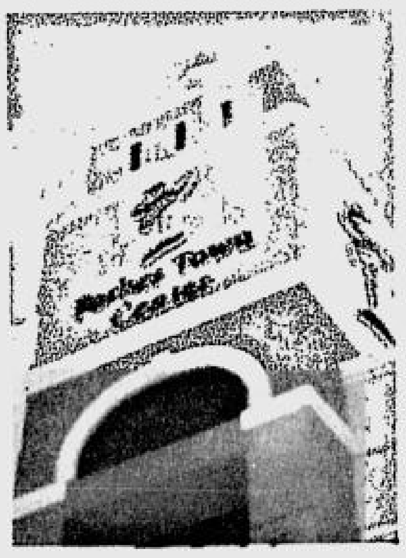


Construction of the six-tower Forbeswood Heights kicked off with a concrete pouring ceremony attended by (from left) Bonifacio West Development Corporation director Kirk U. Young, president Charlie Rufino, vice chairman Jacques Dupasquier, Megaworld chair and president Andrew Tan, 19-1 Realty director Macario Rufino and Megaworld senior vice president Kingson Sian.

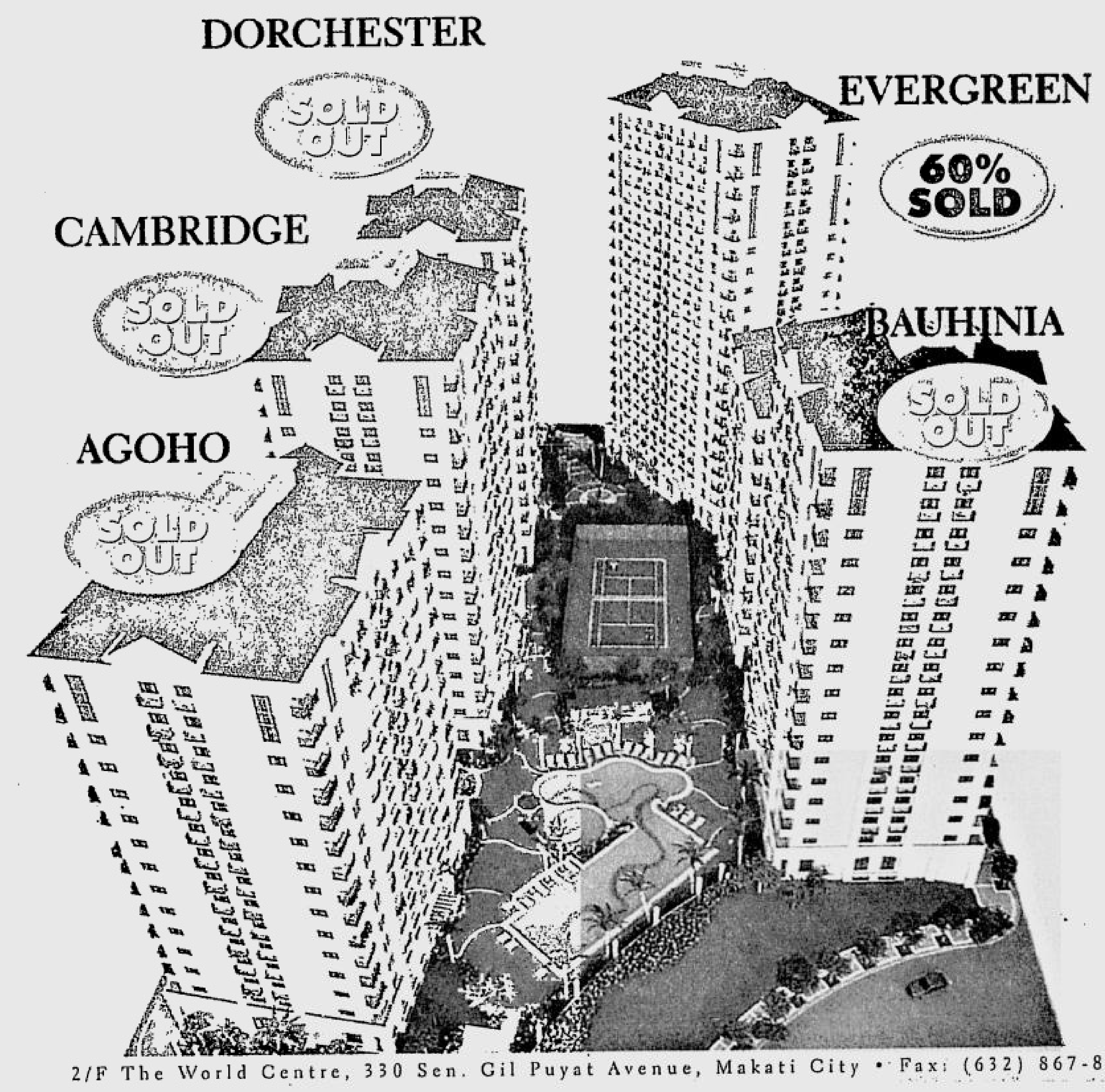
Forbeswood Heights has captured the imagination of urban professionals doing business or working in Makati and Ortigas. With its tropical-paradise allure and the modern conveniences afforded by its vantage location in the Global City, touted as the next most important CBD, the project promises a superior-standard of living for its residents. To date, Forbeswood Heights has joined Megaworld's portfolio of fast-selling projects, with the Agoho, Bauhinia, Cambridge and Dorchester towers already sold out and Evergreen 60 percent sold.

Joint venture partners Megaworld Corporation and Bonifacio West Development Corp. recently held a concrete pouring ceremony to mark the start of construction of the first and third towers (Agoho and Cambridge) of Forbeswood Heights. The two are scheduled for completion by 2006.

At the site bordering the Manila Golf and Country Club, an impressive three-story grand showroom offers visitors an intimate view of Forbeswood Heights and its community. Model units showcasing the best architectural and interior designs give clients a taste of the sumptuous lifestyle offered only at Forbeswood Heights. The showroom also features a UCC Café at the ground level, a thoughtful addition for visitors who want to unwind after touring the model units. A few steps away, McDonald's, the anchor establishment of Forbes Town Road, caters to people on the go.



Forbeswood Heights is an address for people who want to enjoy the comforts of home from a luxurious garden retreat in the middle of a world-class city. It is a valuable investment—one that enables customers to own the whole of paradise and not just a piece of it.



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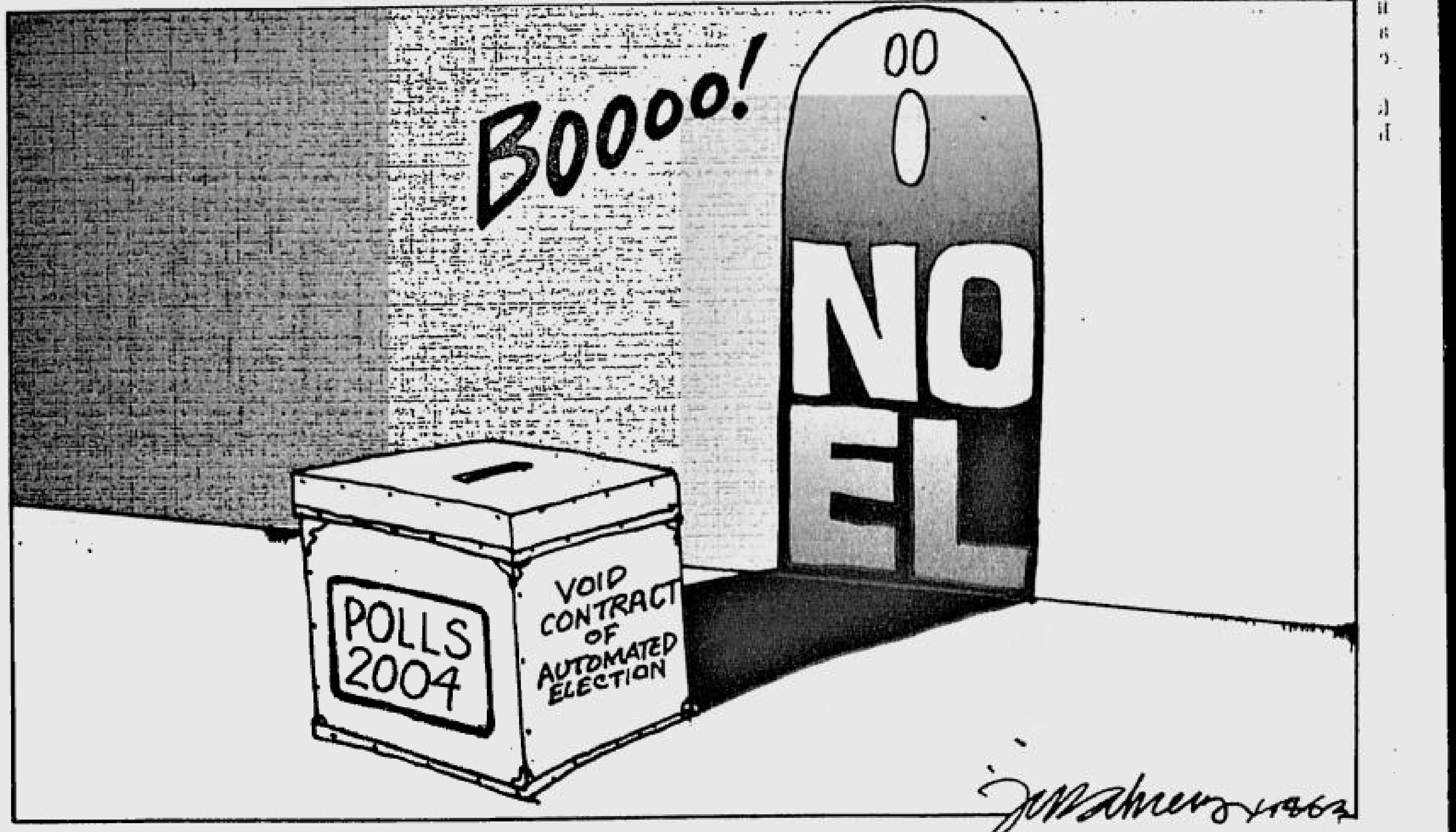
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What change?

EDITORIAL

ACTOR Fernando Poe Jr. says he is running for president in response to an "overwhelming clamor" from the Filipino people. "Everyone I talked to as I went around the country wanted change," the presidential candidate of the newly formed Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino declared over the weekend. "The clamor was so overwhelming that I could no longer turn my back on the people."

Filipinos must be deaf. If indeed there was big clamor for Poe to seek the highest office since two years ago, very few seem to have heard it. For many months, there was only one man crying out in the wilderness to proclaim the coming of a Poe presidency. That man was his *kumpadre* Joseph Estrada, the disgraced former president.

The idea of fielding Poe against President Macapagal-Arroyo and former Education Secretary Raul Roco was picked up by the opposition only after they discovered that there was no one among them who could beat either of the two. Then Senators Edgardo Angara and Vicente Sotto III joined Estrada in trying to persuade Poe to run. And even then Poe was still trailing Roco and Sen. Noli de Castro in the surveys. Unless it can be shown that Estrada, Angara and Sotto represent the voice of the people, where was the "overwhelming clamor" for Poe to seek the presidency?

If Poe looks like a serious presidential contender now, it is not because he bowed to popular demand. It is because he yielded to the temptation offered by the opposition to hold the highest office in the land. So Poe should drop that claim about having no political ambition before he loses one of the already few attributes that, in his own estimation, make him qualified for the presidency: his credibility.

Poe, in his most memorable utterance so far as a candidate, has said he deserves to be president because he is sincere, he loves his country, he is not corrupt and he is beholden to no one. With the possible exception of some politicians in Poe's camp, each of the 84 million Filipinos can say truthfully that he is sincere and he loves his country. Only a few—and that includes Poe—will say those virtues are enough to make one a good president. Again it's easy to claim incorruptibility when one has not been exposed to the very tempting possibilities of making easy money while holding a high position in government, and all of his life Poe has not held public office, high or low. As to being beholden to no one, Poe has already shown he is—to Estrada, for one.

Poe had surprised everyone by excluding Estrada's son, Jinggoy, from the opposition senatorial slate. But when Estrada sulked in his detention center at Camp Capinpin and announced that he was leaving since Poe could win without his help, Poe put the younger Estrada in his ticket. If this early Poe cannot say no to Estrada, what further accommodations will he extend to his old friend—and to others who are helping in his campaign?

When Poe was first asked what he would do with Estrada if he were elected president, he evaded the question by pointing out that the case was still in court. Now from the company he has chosen to keep for his campaign, Poe has left little doubt that the national unity he wants to bring about will be anchored on a total exoneration of the president who was deposed by People Power II. That is what Estrada's loyalists mean when they demand "justice" for their idol, and Poe cannot be expected to do anything less once he gets to Malacañang.

And if Estrada gets off the hook in a Poe presidency, what about the Marcoses who are also supporting his candidacy? Will they get to keep all the billions that the other deposed president amassed during his 20 years in power?

And what about all those discredited politicians, from both the Marcos and Estrada administrations, who are either in his ticket or helping him? They are not there out of love or honest belief in Poe's leadership. The moment Poe steps into Malacañang, they are not going to let him forget he owes them his position.

Poe has said the first order of business for his administration would be to restore the people's trust and confidence in government. But to most thinking Filipinos, he cannot be trusted to exercise power wisely and well if only because he lacks the education and has absolutely no experience in running the government. Up to now he has not tried to disabuse them of their misgivings or ease their apprehensions by at least revealing what he plans to do as president.

It is not enough to say that people want change. Poe should tell the nation what needs changing and how he proposes to effect such change. Or is that already too much to expect from him?

New bets may have new ideas

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

ONE of the bright spots in the coming May elections is that there are a few young and idealistic candidates who may bring in fresh ideas and institute much needed reforms in government. Of course they are greatly outnumbered by the older traditional politicians with fossilized ideas, insatiable greed and incurable corruption. But if we elect the new faces, that could be the first of a thousand steps toward reform.

The people are sick and tired of the *trapos* but in election after election, they keep getting elected because they have the name recall, the money, the political machinery and the family dynasties. The new faces are at a disadvantage precisely because they are new and unfamiliar to the voters.

But if we continue to elect *trapos* whose bad habits are already ingrained, we will never have reforms, our country will never improve, the poor will keep getting poorer and the rich richer, anarchy will spread, and we will descend into the ranks of banana republics. Shouldn't we, therefore, project the new faces to the attention of the public so that they will get a fighting chance to get elected and institute reforms?

Toward this end, the Kapihan sa Manila is presenting first the new faces in its weekly breakfast forums at the Manila Hotel. Last Monday, we had Amina Rasul, daughter of former Sen. Santanina Rasul, who represents the Muslim sector in the opposition KNP ticket, and Berna Romulo-Puyat, daughter of Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo and granddaughter of Carlos P. Romulo and Gil J. Puyat. She is running for representative of the first district of Quezon City in the Lakas ticket.

Wedged between them like a thorn among the roses was former Manila Mayor (and former police general, NBI director, DILG secretary and presidential candidate) Alfredo Lim not because he is a young politician but because he is not a *trapo* in the worst sense of the term, has no family dynasty and political machinery. Lim who, by the way, was also falsely accused of not being a Filipino when he ran for president, just like FPJ now, is more of a lone wolf in politics. He is now a senatorial candidate in the KNP ticket.

Next Monday, we will have more new faces—Pia Cayetano, daughter of the late Sen. Renato Cayetano and a senatorial candidate in the Lakas ticket, and Jamby Madrigal, a scion of the Madrigal clan and a senatorial candidate of the KNP.

The refreshing thing about Rasul, Lim and Romulo-Puyat is that they don't intend to be squatter-coddlers (at least, that's what they said). Almost all the present legislators know that the squatting problem has become a hundred times worse because of the passage of that stupid Lina Law which encourages squatting, but not one of them has the courage to introduce legislation to either repeal or amend that law. They are all afraid of the squatters because they are voters. No candidate will dare say in public that they would amend it if they are elected, either, because that will lessen their chances of being elected, but not Rasul, Lim and Puyat.

These three acknowledged that squatting has gotten worse, and will continue to get worse with the present band-aid remedies, and that professional squatters are getting away with murder, victimizing not only the property owners but also the genuine squatters. They recommend legislation that will make it faster to try professional squatters and mete them stiffer penalties.

Bleeding hearts think they are helping the poor squatters. They don't, actually. They help only the professional squatters who get rich on the property of others, exact rent from the genuine squatters, steal water and electricity and sell them at onerous prices to these same squatters. They victimize lower middle class property owners—teachers, clerks, government workers—who are poorer than the professional squatters and paid for their lots on installment with hard-earned savings, only to be taken over by squatters.

Worse, local government units which are tasked with ejecting squatters, don't help them and not only continue to collect real estate taxes from them but even increase these taxes periodically. To rub salt on the wound, the LGUs spend these taxes for the squatters. The unkindest cut is that local government officials not only tolerate squatters but even bring them into their territories because they are voters. And barangay officials, who are supposed to be the first line of defense against squatting, actually encourage squatters because they collect *tong* from them.

Puyat, who is a housing consultant for several agencies, thinks that the answer is to provide housing for the squatters with livelihood opportunities nearby.

Rasul thinks one answer is to spread development and jobs to the provinces. Squatters troop to the urban areas because the jobs are there. Give them jobs where they live and they won't leave. They really prefer to stay home, she said.

Lim thinks the answer is to strictly enforce the residence requirement of the Election Code. Voters should be allowed to vote only in their permanent addresses. And since squatters have their permanent addresses in their hometowns, they would have to vote there so they would not be disfranchised. If that was good enough for Joseph and Mary during biblical times, it should be good enough for us. That would not give any incentive to local politicians to be squatter-coddlers.

Second-class citizens

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

FRANKLY, I don't understand this mentality. Erap can't get a visa to the US so he's shopping around for another country to get remedy for his debilitated knees. "It could be Japan or any third country with the same medical facilities," a friend of his says. Well, his knees are the least of his problems, his brain is first.

Arthritis is not an uncommon problem. It is not a rare or complex disease like brain tumor that requires top-of-the-line specialists or medical facilities. Even in its advanced stage like the one he has, which has ravaged his knees and made walking painful. And even if it did require specialists and sophisticated medical facilities, this country does not lack for both. St. Luke's and Makati Med are but two of the hospitals in this country that have them. Not all the good doctors have immigrated to America or Japan or any third country Erap is contemplating going to.

In any case, the advantage of having local doctors in Erap's case is that he can always talk to them in Tagalog. He'll never know if something is lost in the translation abroad and the American and Japanese doctors ended up operating on his brain instead of his knees—though that can result only in an improvement. In any case as well, what on earth does he want to get back on his feet for? He'll just be drinking and eating and fornicating some more once he gets well. He does not need to be mobile for that. He just needs a chair and a table and a bed.

But let us leave him to his ambitions for recovery. The question is: Why this attitude of anywhere but the Philippines? Why this absolute distrust of Filipino doctors and utter allergy to local ministration? Isn't he the same person the UP professors—the same ones who are trying to improve FPJ's mind, imagining themselves to be Aristotle teaching Alexander—said would be excellent for the country since they had imparted to him love of it? A horrible pedagogy since, if those professors themselves loved their country, why were they foisting him on it? But that's another story.

I do not know that the citizens of other countries routinely profess a desire to go abroad at all costs to seek treatment for a fairly common affliction. Certainly, I do not know that their presidents or prime ministers, current or ex, do. It openly insults the country and sets it up for ridicule. What is it saying basically but that this country's professionals cannot be expected to do a decent job even on matters that do not require rare abilities? Can you imagine Lee Kuan Yew or Mahathir saying that? Indeed, can you imagine Thaksin or Megawati saying that? Not even Suharto, who is ailing, has done so. Not to speak of the heads of the Indochinese countries to whom that idea is about as acceptable as being ruled by the Americans.

There and then, you see why this country is biting the dust of its Southeast Asian neighbors. But the surprising thing is not just that a former president can be free to suggest this, it is that the public itself thinks it the most natural thing in the world. That is so because it isn't Erap alone who's done it. Most every person of means in this country thinks instinctively of seeking medical attention abroad. More than courting efficacy, it advertises status. *Wa* class if you just go to a local hospital to hide your pregnancy or get an injection for STD. Elsewhere, the medical community would have protested Erap's attitude or behavior bitterly.

Frankly, I don't know why we protest being discriminated against abroad by foreigners when we do a fine job discriminating against ourselves right here. We do not just agree to become second-class citizens abroad, we agree to become second-class citizens in this country. The preparation for living a servile existence begins here, with ample help from our leaders.

In other countries, when foreigners visit, they learn the local language so they can communicate with their residents. Here, when foreigners visit, we speak to them in English as part of being hospitable. Indeed, we do more than that, we denigrate our own language, or languages, and regard the ability to speak English not just as the mark of education but as a mark of intelligence. Listen to FM radio and you'll see that many announcers there do not just take pride in speaking English with an American accent, they take pride in speaking Tagalog with an American accent. You want to do as much violence to them as they are doing to Tagalog.

Elsewhere, people take pride in the way they look and make movie stars of the best-looking among them. Here, we try to hide, or change, the way we look with skin whiteners and nose-lifts and are aghast that Ruffa Gutierrez can lose a beauty contest to a *negra*. Elsewhere, people take pride in the beauty of their country and the qualities of their citizens. Here people have no end of complaints about the heat and the traffic and the way the unsavory characters in Naia hustle visitors at every turn. Of course those characters ought to be shot, but this country has no lack of virtues too, as foreigners themselves attest to. For all our inquisitiveness, which often border on the personal, one American once told me, we Filipinos are genuinely hospitable.

It's not just a mentality of the other man's grass is always greener, it's a mentality of all the grass in this country having been dried up by drought. So when a former president thinks to seek surgery for arthritic knees anywhere but the Philippines, people argue only whether or not he will return to this country. No one demands to know why he must leave in the first place. No, it is not our knees, or our hearts, or our livers that seriously need repair, it's our brains.

Unfortunately, no doctor, here or abroad, can cure that.

Better disposal of 'mad cow' carcasses

FEATURE

Anupama Chandrasekaran

NEW YORK—The bodies of dead cattle infected with mad cow disease are usually burned to destroy the misshapen proteins suspected of causing the brain-wasting ailment—although there are doubts whether this is safe, cost-effective or environmentally sound.

An Indiana-based company, set up by two professors from Albany Medical College, claims to have an effective alternative.

You don't have to go further than your kitchen sink to understand the science.

Their company, Waste Reduction by Waste Reduction Inc., says that by using the kinds of chemicals that go into a drain-clearing product such as Drano, they can safely break down the suspected disease-causing proteins, known as prions.

Prions are misshaped proteins believed to cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease. They eat at the brain tissue of cattle by forcing proteins performing other jobs to take their shape, resulting in a chain reaction.

Incineration has been the popular method to destroy the carcasses of afflicted cattle but researchers say tests have revealed that the prions—like the mythical phoenix—survive and can emerge from the ashes.

Waste Reduction claims its pressure cooker-like machine, known as a digester, not only breaks prions into harmless amino acids but emits no toxic gases and operates at a fraction of the cost of an incinerator.

The US Department of Agriculture bought a machine and started testing it in November, a month before the first US case of mad cow disease was discovered in a dairy cow in Washington state.

The Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Madison is working with the USDA to test the digester on deer carcasses infected with a prion disease similar to mad cow.

> Prions are misshaped proteins believed to cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease

"In the inactivation of abnormal prions, the digester has a leg up over incineration and we are able to do it at a third of the cost," Robert Shull, director of the Wisconsin laboratory, told Reuters.

The United States jolted the world meat industry on Dec. 23 by announcing the first case of mad cow disease in US history. The news rocked the cattle industry, the single largest sector of US agriculture, as two dozen countries halted US beef imports, which account for about 10 percent of annual production and $3.2 billion in sales.

USDA says the infected cow came from Canada. But it slaughtered about 450 bull calves in Washington state that were linked to the infected dairy cow as it strives to convince consumers that US beef is safe.

The agency has also announced sweeping measures to tag and test US cattle and other steps to boost confidence. Officials say the digester may help that process.

"At this point the USDA plans to hold test animals until we get test results back," said Linn Wilbur, a USDA veterinary surgeon.

"What we are anticipating is that the carcasses will be kept in coolers and, if we found any positives, they will go through the digesters, and the negatives will go through the normal rendering process," he said.

Rendering is the process of reducing the remains of cow carcasses into smaller pieces to be used in animal feeds.

In the digester, a big stainless steel container, a solution of sodium or potassium hydroxide is poured over the carcass.

Heat is applied and the chemical reaction, which also produces heat, then reduces the mass into a slurry for tests.

Through this method, proteins, nucleic acids and infectious microorganisms are converted into a sterile solution of sugars and small peptides, which are chains of amino acids that in turn form proteins.

Operating costs for the digesters, about 25 cents per pound of carcass, are lower than that of incinerators, which can cost 80 cents to a $1 a pound due to high fuel costs.

"The science of this method has been known for quite some time," said Giuseppe Legname, a neurology professor at the University of California San Francisco. Contaminated lab animals are frequently given a similar chemical wash under the influence of heat and pressure, he said.

"They have merely patented the process," Legname said of Waste Reduction by Waste Reduction.

Reuters

Showcase of ideas

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

"IT'S like the history of the NGO movement of the Philippines passed before my eyes!" exclaimed Social Welfare Secretary Dinky Soliman during the closing ceremonies of "Panibagong Paraan," the first Philippine Development Innovation Marketplace.

Dinky's quick nostalgia trip was occasioned by the announcement of the winners in the competition, which sought to identify innovative development projects to be given start-up grants. As the winners were called and went up the stage, said Dinky, she could spot faces from all phases of her own extensive NGO experience, from colleagues she had emulated when she was just starting out, to NGO stalwarts she had "grown up" with, to community leaders and people's organization leaders she had trained and supported. Indeed, several "generations" of civil society were present onstage. Though few of them could be said to be "national" figures, all of them had one thing in common: years of experience in and commitment to human and community development.

Walking through the exhibits of the "Panibagong Paraan" finalists at the Megatrade Hall in Megamall, I felt my spirit lifting. I'd walked through much the same maze of booths many times before, mainly in search of bargains, but this was the first time I, and perhaps the thousands of other visitors last Jan. 9 and 10, would be going "shopping" for ideas. It was the first time for many of the organizations represented to "sell" themselves to the public, and for many of the visitors to see evidence of the strength and vibrancy of the Philippine NGO movement.

* * *

THE MEANING of the event was not lost on the visitors, many of whom took time to write down their comments before leaving the hall.

"Politicians keep out!" one young visitor warned. "This proves that Filipinos can really do outstanding things if politicians are not involved," another visitor noted, echoing a common sentiment. Others commented on the quality of the projects on display, on the range of issues and concerns they covered, and on how *"galing"* ordinary Filipinos can be.

Indeed, for sheer variety and uniqueness, the projects offer more than just glimmers of hope for the country. Former President Cory Aquino, invited as keynote speaker at the closing rites, remarked: "Right here in this very hall is a marvelous collection of great work that creates hope in every person that these organizations help on a daily basis. Theirs is about more work and less talk. More of finding solutions together than shouting slogans. Each and everyone of them, as well as others like them in other parts of our country deserve to be awarded for these groups did not wait for anyone to lead them."

The groups participating in the marketplace ran the gamut from national NGOs, newly formed community organizations, welfare groups, youth groups, school and student organizations, even a homeowners' association. Almost 1,800 entries were submitted when the competition was announced last September, and of these 121 finalists, from Abra to Tawi-tawi, were selected based on the following criteria: innovativeness, partnership, impact and cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and replicability.

* * *

AMONG THE 50 awardees was a project that seeks to turn "war trash," that is, spent bullets and casings of rockets, in Basilan into craft items, most especially bells and gongs that are, said a proponent, "symbols of peace for the people." While serving to help clear Basilan of the litter of conflict, the project will also provide out-of-school youth with skills training.

Pinasama, an organization of urban poor women, was awarded for their project to mainstream children with disabilities into pre-school education. Another recognized project seeks to incorporate DNA evidence in the resolution of sexual abuse cases.

One project, remarkable for its utter simplicity though it seeks to address a complex problem, seeks to restore the population of wild Philippine eagles by "linking" scattered forested areas in Mindanao with forested "corridors" through denuded areas. The first step in the project would be to call for a stakeholder conference to get everyone, especially the landowners and local governments in the proposed corridors, to agree on a plan to restore the forest cover, though the young proponents admitted that "it might take 50 years before we can see this project bear fruit." But that's what development is, is it not, an investment made today for a better future?

* * *

THE FINALISTS also selected among themselves one project for the "People's Choice Award," given to the Western Mindanao State University for its proposed "Floating School," designed to provide literacy education for out-of-school Badjao and Sama children, concentrating on island and coastal barangays. Aside from receiving funding as an awardee, the proponent also won two scholarship grants from the Asian Institute of Management courtesy of AIM and the Peace and Equity Foundation.

Apart from being a showcase of development ideas and initiatives, "Panibagong Paraan" also demonstrated partnerships—among various multilateral funding organizations, between government and NGO's, and among communities—at work in the service of development.

Through partnerships with the donor community and grant-giving NGOs, the award fund for Panibagong Paraan more than tripled the original award funds from the World Bank Group, making it possible to reward more winners. Representatives of government and civil society groups were also part of the Advisory and Technical Working Groups while the jury team was composed of current and former government officials, members of the academic, civil society, media, business and donor community.

Pascual B. Racuyal

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

TEXTBOOK history tells us that Manuel L. Quezon was president of the Philippine Commonwealth and that he defeated Emilio Aguinaldo and Gregorio Aglipay in the 1935 elections. As living historical relics from the Philippine Revolution, Aguinaldo and Aglipay are not ignored like Pascual B. Racuyal who ran (and lost) to every Philippine president from Quezon to Marcos. Mention "nuisance candidate" and the name Racuyal always crops up. While he was typecast as a madman or, at best, eccentric, we should give him points for sheer persistence.

The present list of candidates for president, though long, leaves little room for choice. Aside from the candidates who make news there are many who have some interesting things to say—one promises a US visa for every Filipino, another claims to be a friend of US president George Bush though they haven't met in person. Most of the fascinating candidates will be, like Racuyal, dismissed as "nuisance candidates" or disqualified because they cannot prove that they can mount and sustain a real presidential campaign.

Going through the Manila Times morgue I found out that in the 1969 elections, Racuyal challenged President Ferdinand Marcos and Sen. Sergio Osmeña to a 12-hour debate in Plaza Miranda. The papers do not mention if he was able to deliver a six-hour speech in the same place that promised to be the longest in modern Philippine history. When election returns from Rizal came in he actually placed third, after Marcos and Osmeña, with "79 solid votes." If elected, he promised to run the country by remote control!

In 1952 Racuyal invited Manila Mayor Arsenio Lacson to run as his vice president. Naturally, Lacson declined and described Racuyal as "strictly fiction, utterly fantastic and incredible." Incredible is the only way to describe his 10-point platform as follows:

"1. Application of naturo-therapy as the best means of solving the Huk problem; 2. Introduction of Racuyal's Standard Calendar of 30 days a month, 13 months a year, which if found imperfect, could be corrected by an international conference of astronomers; 3. Adoption of the name Jehovah for the 13th day of each month (there was no suggestion for the name of the proposed 13th month); 4. Construction of a system of plastic railroads throughout Mindanao; 5. Abolition of floods in Central Luzon through a top-secret system of dikes; 6. Institution of a new monetary system with plastic currency which would be fire-proof, water-proof and counterfeit-proof; 7. Establishment of the seat of the UN Assembly in Baguio as the main purpose for his foreign policy since the UN failed to establish peace in Lake Success and will certainly fail in Paris; 8. Use of an algebraic-geometric detection code for rooting graft and corruption out of the government; 9. Resort to surprise blitzkrieg raids by helicopter all over the Philippines which [Racuyal] would undertake personally to combat racketeers, gangsters and other vices; and; 10. To solve the recurrent mayor-board rifts in Manila, the abolition of the municipal board!"

Had the Racuyal-Lacson team won, Lacson would have remained in Malacañang while Racuyal toured the country and sent back confidential reports such as a sample he sent the press on July 16, 1953:

"During my short stay in Baguio City, I found the roads very clean, climate was cool, the people were peaceful, no mosquitoes and few flies, many leaves of cabbages were attacked by worms, Everlasting flowers and pine trees abundant. Locations of City Hall and Baguio City Hospital good, the City beginning 7:00 p.m. quiet. The inhabitants used to wake up often early in the morning to begin the real battle for existence. The front City Market very nice to look at, concrete while the back sections composed of *barong-barong* not pleasant to the eyes of the tourists.

"Recommendations: 1. Barong-barong constructions should be replaced with concrete ones in the market; 2. A MOUNTAIN UNIVERSITY should be constructed for National Leadership training; 3. The Hanging Garden at the Burnham Park should be constructed; 4. Public Speech Park with nice platform should be constructed for political candidates, civic organizations and students rally; 5. Highway reflectors should be constructed to avoid accidents; 6. Mobile unit patrols should be organized; 7. There should be Sunday concerts; 8. Swimming pools diluted with chemicals (germicides) should be constructed; 9. There should be basketball, volleyball, tennis, boxing and indoor baseball and skating tournaments.

"Please note that MENTAL DEVIATION IS AN ASSET TO AN INDIVIDUAL.

"Baguio City is the best place for the future seat of the United Nations or for the WORLD GOVERNMENT.

"I admire the action of the chief of Police giving punishments to the Members of the Police Force who had been charged with sleeping on duty, etc. And I admire also the initiative work of the Hon. Provincial Governor to round up the Igorot beggars in the City of Manila and have them sent back to Baguio City with free transportation for the simple reason of dignity."

Given modern telecommunications and Filipinos fascination for the weird it wouldn't be surprising if Racuyal would garner more than 79 solid votes if he ran today.

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

A society of beggars?

COMMENTARY

John J. Carroll, S.J.,
Institute on Church and Social Issues

"PAMASKO!" "Pamasko!" Night after night before Christmas as I walked home I found myself besieged by street kids asking for handouts from passers-by while their makeshift "choirs" sang Christmas hymns in screeching voices at the gates of affluent-looking homes. A few days before Christmas, my Jesuit community as well as others in the neighborhood ran parties for those kids, who showed up for them by the hundreds!

It is all part of the excitement of a Filipino Christmas, vastly different from the indoor, family-centered Christmases of my youth back in wintry New Jersey. And yet it makes one wonder. These kids asking for *"pamasko"* or instinctively holding out their hand for a coin whenever they meet an adult, especially a foreigner, on the street: is begging becoming for them a way of life?

It has long been recognized that Philippine society is a society of unequals, made tolerable to a degree by redistribution from the affluent to the needy. In traditional settings the redistribution was formalized in landlord-tenant, rich relative-poor relative, political leader-follower ties, etc.; in each of these the "little person" sacrificed a bit of his or her independence in return for the security which came from dependence on a "big person." The latter's status as a "big person" was validated by his or her generosity and number of dependents. The handing out of *"pamasko"* and Christmas parties for the poor may stem from this, though it in no way provides the security of the old "patron-client" relationship.

The traditional system has broken down especially with migration to the urban areas, and the insecurity of the "little person" has become more painful, driving some into begging. But not all: at Payatas despite tremendous poverty and insecurity there, I have met no beggars. My Jesuit colleague, Arthur Tangara, reflected recently on the group of mothers, most of whom have children in our feeding programs, who gather with him regularly for prayer and faith-sharing sessions. He is struck first by the physical poverty of these women, the inability to provide sufficient food, medicines and educational opportunities for their children. Secondly there is the psycho-emotional-physical abuse which some of them suffer at the hands of husbands who are defeated by life and dependent on alcohol or drugs.

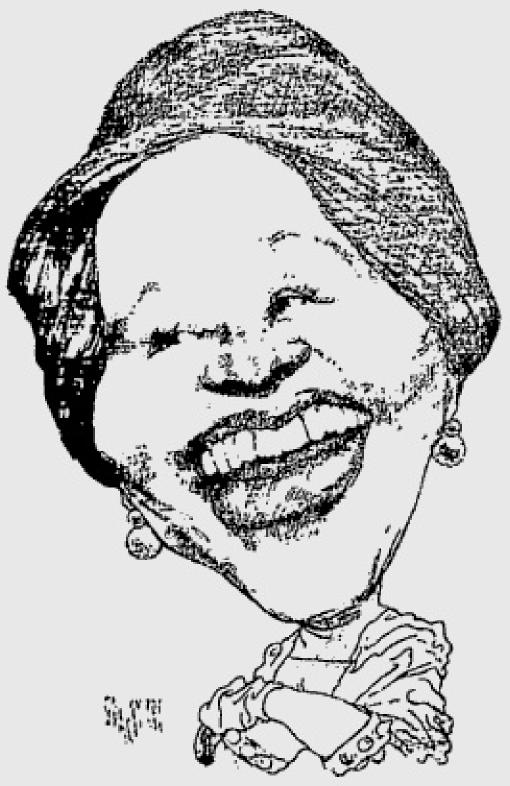
Most importantly perhaps, Brother Tangara is struck by the deep faith of these women, expressed in terms such as the following: "*Sige lang brader; brader, hindi naman natutulog ang Dios, diba? Basta siya na ang bahala sa amin. Iniaalay ko na sa kaniya ang lahat. Umaasa na lang ako na darating din ang araw na malalampasanan ko rin ang mga pagsubok na ito.*" (It's OK brother; brother, God doesn't sleep, does He? It is enough that He takes care of us. I offer everything to Him. I only hope that the day will come when these trials will be things of the past.)

At the same time, these women still long for a powerful and generous benefactor who can provide a more material sense of security. And for this reason they are deeply committed to the candidacy of Fernando Poe Jr. The hero image which he projects on the silver screen has become real for them; he is their hero. Moreover, since he is a friend of former President Estrada, they hope that he will fulfill what they see as Erap's dream of helping them, and come to their aid.

Thus, if elite democracy in the Philippines is in the process of self-destruction, it is precisely because in the almost 60 years of its existence, it has done little to relieve the growing insecurity of the poor. The economy has provided magnificent homes for the wealthy, condos, golf courses and country clubs, shopping malls with the best of imported luxury goods, yes, and magnificent churches and university campuses. But for the lower 30 percent, security of tenure on their house-plots, jobs, education for their children, rural development and agrarian reform, health care and provision for emergencies are woefully lacking. To cite only a few examples from the World Bank's "Filipino Report Card on Pro-Poor Services": only one-fourth of the poor have piped water in their homes, and two-fifths either get their own water from streams etc. or buy it from vendors; government housing assistance goes mainly to the non-poor, and the poor who work mainly in the informal sector are not eligible for it; the non-poor buy more of the subsidized rice (for servants and pets?) than do the poor.

The insecurity of the poor has now become a source of massive insecurity for the elite as it contemplates the possibility of an FPJ presidency, and there is a rush to "voter education" in the hope of heading off this threat. The threat is surely real, especially when one looks at his senatorial slate. But I am not sure that the alienation produced by 60 years of exclusion can be overcome in four months. What is needed is not short-term voter-ed but long-term citizens-ed—beginning with listening to the poor and understanding their needs as a step toward bringing them into full participation in the national life. It may not change the results of the coming election, and it will be costly, but until this is done, our whole political system will be built on sand.

IN THE NEWS



Miriam Defensor-Santiago

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Where were opposers during public consultations?

I WOULD like to react to the news item titled "10,000 sign petition to stop logging in Aurora." (PDI, 11/20/03)

The news item did not mention any justification for the alleged logging ban campaign. Neither was there any reason cited to support the suggested cancellation of the permits of the logging companies operating in Aurora province.

The statement of the multi-sectoral action group (MSAG)-Aurora that the government's reforestation programs were "merely instruments of unscrupulous loggers conniving with corrupt (DENR) personnel" was a sweeping accusation that has no basis in fact. They wanted Natural Resources Secretary Elisea G. Gozun to investigate and prosecute DENR personnel behind the "environmental plunder," but they did not say who these people are and the specific offense committed by them.

Before the logging companies in Aurora were awarded their timber license agreement (TLA) or integrated forest management agreement (Ifma), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources conducted multi-sectoral public hearings/consultations in the affected municipalities where all were invited to voice their positions on the matter, including local government units, people's organizations and non-government organizations.

But where were Mr. Joey Escriber and the 10,000 signatories to the alleged petition at the time of the public consultations? Why did they not object to the issuance of the Ifmas at that time?

To my mind this is all black propaganda, pure and simple, a disinformation drive to discredit the legitimate TLA/Ifma holders whose business operations have already contributed immensely to the socio-economic development of Aurora province. Escriber wants a total logging ban imposed in the province but he does not offer any better alternative livelihood and socio-economic development programs for the people who will be dislocated as a consequence of such a total ban.

The TLA/Ifma holders in Aurora are serious and legitimate investors and some of them have been there for a long time. They have spent so much to develop and manage their respective areas following existing laws and regulations. They have constructed roads connecting hinterland barangays to the *poblacion*. They have provided service centers, as well as affordable wood materials for housing. More importantly, they have provided long-term employment to thousands of poor people in Aurora.

I do not see any reason at all for a logging ban in Aurora province. The forests are managed by the DENR under the principle of sustainable forest management. This involves managing, developing and utilizing forest lands and resources to achieve continuous production of goods and services without impairing the sustained-yield capacity of the forest.

Definitely, the continued existence of these TLAs/Ifmas which strictly adhere to the policy of sustainable forest management will assure a better life for the people of Aurora. Do not allow disinformation to mislead them!

—ARTHUR C. PASCUA, forestry consultant, 126V. Luna Road Ext., Sikatuna Village, 1101 Quezon City

No apology, just an explanation

IN RELATION to your editorial of Jan. 9, 2004, titled "Ultimate Kingmaker," we beg to disagree with the editorial's observation on Sen. Loren Legarda.

Senator Legarda has not apologized for her stand during the impeachment trial of former President Joseph Estrada. What she has done is to explain her reasons for doing what she did during the trial to those who sympathized with the former president. As citizens of this country, and part of the national constituency of the senator, they are entitled to an explanation.

You will agree that the Estrada impeachment process has divided the country. This division, which some observers say is along class lines, is not healthy for our country if we are to move forward to stability and progress. Thus, Senator Legarda's efforts to reach out to the other side to try to make them understand the dynamics behind the impeachment process, and why she acted the way she did. Her position was that she wanted to draw out the truth so that she and her fellow senators could make a sound judgment on the matter.

To the extent that she has gained the understanding of some partisans of the former president, she also has succeeded somewhat in healing the wounds inflicted by the controversy.

I hope you will agree that this is more desirable for our country's health than continued divisiveness and wrangling over a past and finished issue.

—DING PANGANIBAN, chief of staff, Office of Sen. Loren Legarda, 6/F Senate of the Philippines, GSIS Building, Pasay City

Biblical texts endorsing the death penalty

THIS refers to the letter of Fr. Ben Moraleda titled "GMA shows true colors." (PDI, 1/2/04) He pictured the decision of President Macapagal-Arroyo to lift the suspension of the death penalty, as just like "Pilate standing between the bleeding and battered Christ, and the raving and murderous mob, screaming for the Master's death…"

I would like to remind Moraleda that lifting the suspension of the death penalty is not immoral as he claimed. Consider God's explicit command to Moses in Exodus 21:12-16, 22-25, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.

"Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death. Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he was caught must be put to death.

"…If men who are fighting hits a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."

The death penalty is God's law! The President's move to push the death penalty is therefore moral and legal. Who are we to question God's wisdom and justice? Why is Moraleda claiming that the death penalty is evil?

Moraleda calls the tooth for a tooth an old law of the jungle. God is not in the category of wild animals.

Our country is bombarded by pornography. The report of the Department of Social Welfare and Development states that from 1997 to 2003, 21,000 children ages 0 to 17 are victims of sexual abuse. The people behind pornography and child sexual abuse must be put to death! The President is doing a great service to this country with the death penalty on top of her agenda.

—BOY BLUE P. FILOMENO, Philippine Alliance Against Pornography, 45 Mahogany St., San Jose del Monte City

'I grew up with FPJ'

FERNANDO Poe Jr. and I grew up in Grace Park, Caloocan. His father (Fernando Poe Sr.) was a hometown hero in our neighborhood. Tiyo Nanding, as we affectionately called him, and my uncle, Director Davao Santiago of Lebran productions, were the sources of food, medicine and clothing of the poor in the area. When Tiyo Nanding died of rabies, the entire community was devastated. I will never forget him.

At Mapua Tech, high school, FPJ and I were classmates. Because of FPJ's good command of the English language, he stood out in class. His demeanor and his being a quick study never ceased to amaze us. While we struggled to finish the book "Silas Marner" for several weeks in our English class, FPJ finished reading the book in one hour and narrated to us the story from beginning to end.

One day, I was involved in a fight with several gang members on the campus on Doroteo Jose Street. FPJ came to my rescue and fought with me against the thugs. We were apprehended and sent to Rosario Vinluan, the principal. We found out later that one of the gang members was a nephew of Tomas Mapua, owner of the school. FPJ assumed the responsibility and accepted punishment, which was a mandatory suspension for one month. He told us that the suspension made it easier for him to quit school which was becoming a bore. With nothing else to learn from going there, he left. Since then, I never heard from FPJ again until our high school graduation in 1957 at Intramuros where he showed up and wished us all well. After college, I left for the United States and lost contact with him.

—DANNY LAMILA, Global Pacific Realty, 443 N. Serrano Ave., Los Angeles, California, USA; e-mail: D.Lamilla@ATT.net

What captures an astronomer's fancy

I APPRECIATED Ceres Doyo's piece last Jan. 8, 2004.

Like her, I watched the Cosmos documentary in total devotion, amazement and wonder. I wallowed in Carl Sagan's lyrical prose in praise of the beauty and exquisite arrangement of the universe. Like Ceres and like him, I wonder if it's just us ("then it's an awful waste of space").

Truly I also wish he were alive today to add his one liner to this recent human triumph.

Sadly, not a lot of people talk about these things. The news is so earth-bound, there's practically no looking up, and beyond.

I'm an engineer by profession. I work in Limay, Bataan as an operations manager for a large Combined Cycle Power Plant. But deep in my heart, I am an astronomer. I know Ceres is, too. Her name betrays this.

I'd like to thank her for the piece that she wrote. It really brightened my day, finding yet another of those rare individuals who share my longings.

—FRANK SANTOS, frank.santos@power.alstom.com

Deadly highway hazards

I AM always saddened by the unnecessary loss of lives due to vehicular accidents like what happened early today at the SLEX. I firmly believe that this kind of accident can be avoided if danger signals are not ignored by all concerned agencies. And one of these danger signals is defective or absence of tail lights and brake lights of motor vehicles.

When I am on Metro Manila roads, I have the habit of keeping track of what kind of motor vehicles are using the roads with no tail lights and/or brake lights. More often than not the violators are public utility vehicles. These vehicles are accidents waiting to happen since most of them are on the road day and night, some for 12 to 18 hours straight.

I hope our Land Transportation Office can do something about this problem by not renewing the registration of these vehicles until repairs are done, and the MMDA must be assiduous in the apprehension of violators. There is no other way.

We will be able to save a lot of innocent lives if we all see these danger signals and do something about it.

—RAMON O. ENCARNACION, Unit 206 FBR Arcade 317 Katipunan Ave., Loyola Heights, Q.C.

Whipping Chinese banks into shape

NEWS ANALYSIS

Alan Wheatley

SINGAPORE—China's injection of $45 billion into two big banks is like buying a health club membership in a New Year's resolution to get fit.

Signing the check is easy. Acquiring the skills and discipline to lend along commercial lines will, like sticking to regular exercise and a wholesome diet, be a lot harder.

For the revolution in corporate governance at the big four state-owned banks promised as part of the infusion of fresh capital implies that China's Communist party is ready to loosen its grip on a key lever of economic power and patronage.

Yet how can the banks, which are slated for partial privatization once they have been cleaned up, be accountable to both profit-maximizing shareholders and to a party used to ordering banks to prop up thousands of walking-dead firms?

"Until one can separate the governors of the banks and the state, you're going to have this conflict of interest and they're just going to behave the way the state wants them to behave," said Stephen Harris, a professor in public policy at the National University of Singapore.

Beijing, after pumping $22.5 billion each into China Construction Bank and Bank of China at the end of last year, was preparing to inject $40 billion into another of the Big Four—Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, a government economist said on Monday.

But in the absence of sharper risk-management expertise and strengthened prudential oversight, shoring up the banks' balance sheets will merely give them the firepower to repeat past mistakes and build up a new pile of sour loans, Harris said.

"If the same practices are in place and nothing changes, you're just pouring money down a black hole," he said.

The challenge is not peculiar to China.

Japan and South Korea, both democracies but with a history of directed lending at the behest of either the government or powerful business groups, have struggled to build prudent, disciplined lending cultures rooted in accountability.

South Korean banks won plaudits for cleaning up their books in the wake of the 1997/98 financial crisis, but last week's $4.2 billion bail-out of LG Card, the country's biggest credit card lender, showed credit analysis remained weak, Harris said.

"What we've seen in Korea is that it's taken a long time: we're six-seven years into the so-called recovery and they still haven't learned how to do good governance," he said.

China should also learn from Japan's experience that half-hearted bank reform is not enough. More than 13 years after Japan's asset price bubble started to deflate, bad loans at the country's banks are still a big drag on the economy.

Bank lending has been falling now for six years.

Masaru Yoshitomi, senior fellow at the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, said China was right to prioritize the recapitalization of banks saddled with bad loans and to create incentives for improved risk management and corporate governance.

But Yoshitomi, who drew up a blueprint for the sequencing of Chinese financial reforms when he was head of the Asian Development Bank Institute, feared Beijing was moving too slowly.

Throwing open the doors to foreign banks by 2007, as agreed when China joined the World Trade Organization, will entail the de facto convertibility of the yuan, with the knock-on risk of a capital account crisis by 2010, he argued.

Yoshitomi said China was in a race against the clock to strengthen its banks. "The direction they're moving in is OK, but the speed may not be fast enough," he said.

Heading off a potential banking crisis is obviously in the interest of all of Asia, which increasingly looks to China as a motor of regional growth.

Successful bank reform would help tackle a glaring shortcoming—a gross misallocation of resources brought about in part by state-directed lending to ailing firms.

China is envied for its growth rate of over 8 percent a year, but economists say that is a pitiful performance for a country whose investment spending exceeds 40 percent of GDP.

India, hardly a model of economic efficiency, is expected to grow more than 7 percent this year with an investment rate of about 23 percent.

China's bank bail-outs are only a baby step toward improving on that record. Experts say the authorities must also clean up the country's creaking, casino-like stock markets so they fulfill their intended role of raising cash for transparently run firms.

Fraser Howie, author of "Privatizing China," a book on China's stock markets, said it was too early to judge the significance of the recent seizure by regulators of China's fifth-largest brokerage, China Southern Securities, on charges of mismanagement.

Although welcome as a step toward restoring investor confidence in the market, the takeover would send the wrong signal if it bailed out big China Southern shareholders—which include prominent listed firms.

"Once again, no one is talking responsibility for poor decisions. Why should they not be held accountable for bad investments? That's desperately needed in China," Howie said. *Reuters*

PGH takes steps to remedy housekeeping lacks

THIS refers to the letters of Dr. Don R. Paloyo, president of the UP-PGH Physician's Association (PDI, 11/6/03, 1/2/04) concerning the financial crisis besetting PGH that has resulted in the shortage of linen and gowns in the operating rooms and other hospital supplies.

During the prioritization workshop focused on the first 100 days that the new UP-PGH administration, led by Director Carmelo A. Alfiler, conducted on Dec. 29, 2003, the points raised in the letters were recognized as among the top concerns. We wish to assure the public and our hospital health workers that intensive efforts are being undertaken to address these and other equally urgent issues. Just recently, the national government released budgetary allocations intended for the last quarter of 2003.

The administration is also sourcing extra funds through partnership with various organizations to help us augment and sustain our hospital's housekeeping needs. With these efforts, coupled with efficient resource utilization and stoppage of undue wastage, UP-PGH hopes to serve our Filipino public and our own community better.

—MICHAEL L. TEE, M.D., assistant to the Director for Public Affairs and spokesperson, Philippine General Hospital, UP Manila, Taft Avenue, Manila

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5 Pangasinan cop chiefs sacked over 'jueteng'

SAN FABIAN, Pangasinan—Five police chiefs in Pangasinan were relieved from their posts because of their supposed failure to stop jueteng in their towns.

But the mayors in the towns and city where the police officers were assigned said the action by Chief Supt. Claudio Cabreros, Ilocos police director, was "unfair" because jueteng operations in their areas had stopped.

Ordered relieved by Cabreros were Chief Insp. Harris Fama of Mangaldan, Chief Insp. Jericho Royales of Pozorrubio, Chief Insp. Romulo Doral of Manaoag, Chief Insp. Genaro Sapiera of San Fabian and Supt. Rolando Diaz of San Carlos City.

The order, however, was subject to the provision of the Commission on Elections' Resolution No. 6456, which guides the movement or reassignment of government employees and police officials during the election period.

San Fabian Mayor Mojamito Libunao Jr. claimed jueteng had stopped in his town, saying reports given to the regional police command "might not have been properly verified or researched."

"I respect the decision of the regional (police) director, but I want to find out the basis (for that decision) because I have verified that jueteng operations have stopped completely and that no raids have been conducted in the town," Libunao said.

In San Carlos City, Mayor Julian Resuello said the relief of Diaz was "unfair" and had "no justification." "What we knew was that there was a 'one-strike' policy. But there was no raid conducted in the city so what's their basis for relieving the chiefs of police?" Resuello asked.

But Cabreros said he felt the concerned police officials were not following orders to stop jueteng as shown by reports from the regional police's intelligence group and the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group.

"We validate the reports. They (police chiefs) should ask themselves why only now they're being relieved. There's an order (that) they must follow. We have been telling them time and again (to stop jueteng)," he said.

He said he had also asked for the relief of some police chiefs in the other provinces in the Ilocos region.

In Mangaldan, a day before Fama received his relief order, the police arrested three jueteng bet collectors who admitted that they were not remitting the money because there were no more operations in the town.

"We're doing our job of stopping jueteng. The church and two non-government organizations have certified that there is no jueteng in the town, so I wonder why I'm being relieved," Fama said.

Sapiera said: "Relieving the police chiefs is not the solution (because) we comply with the orders. Our careers are at stake here. We are doing our best." *Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

400 families to lose homes as demolition surprises Cavite poor

DASMARIÑAS, Cavite—More than 3,000 residents of Barangay San Agustin 1 in this town are facing a bleak 2004.

This after their local government and police office yesterday continued with their demolition, which could displace more than 400 families.

The first phase of the operations that started Dec. 10 had already ousted about 100 families and torn down over 40 houses, according to Diwani Cruzet, president of the San Agustin 1 Neighborhood Association.

The second phase of the demolition, which started Jan. 10, could leave over 300 more families homeless, she added.

Cruzet accused Sheriff Tomas Azurin of the Imus Regional Trial Court of personally ordering the alleged illegal demolition of their houses, many of which had been erected for more than 50 years.

She said Azurin abused his power when he ordered the dismantling of some of the houses that were not included in the list of the demolition team.

The lot on which the houses stand is owned by real estate firm Solar Resources, owned by businessman Wilson Cheng.

Cruzet said the demolition came without warning.

She said a resident, Efren Alvaran, 47, suffered a heart attack and died during the demolition.

Alvaran's family pleaded that their home be spared until he was buried but their appeal went unheeded. *Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Sorsogon measles outbreak kills 11

SORSOGON CITY—The Provincial Health Office (PHO) has declared a measles outbreak in the city after 11 persons, aged one to 22 years old, were reported dead because of the disease as of last week.

This month alone, the health office has so far recorded at least 91 persons who had been infected with the disease.

At least 39 of them required hospitalization.

The health office noted that measles was more prevalent among preschool children.

Health workers of the city said most of the recorded cases of measles came from Barangay Sampaloc with 64 cases and Barangay Cambulaga with 18 cases.

One victim of measles each was posted in the districts of Cabid-an Tugos, San Isidro Bibincahan, Mahingan, Talisay, Sirangan and Burabod-Sorsogon and San Isidro-Bacon.

Health officials reported the deaths in Barangays Sampaloc, Cambulaga and Talisay.

Five persons were reported dead in Sampaloc; five in Cambulaga and one in Talisay.

Health officers urged residents in these areas to take all precautionary measures to stop the further spread of the highly contagious disease. *Emir Emano Gamis, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Gordon says he made RP tourism rebound

BAGUIO CITY—He may not have reached his "self-imposed" tourism target in 2003, but former Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon said he is not a failure.

Gordon, who is running for senator under the administration ticket, said his two-year term drew more foreign and domestic tourists than previous tourism secretaries.

Gordon said on Monday that the Department of Tourism had reduced its 2.2-million target for 2003 to 1.9 million when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome struck Asia.

"Even Malaysia saw a reduced tourism when SARS struck, and that was with all the (resources that country) had invested into marketing Malaysia. Malaysia lost tourists by 27 percent," he said.

No Asian country had escaped the impact of SARS, except for Hong Kong toward the end of the year, Gordon said. China officially lifted visa restrictions on the former British colony, allowing its nationals to visit the Asian region's economic hub, he said. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Group says gov misses point on P215-M loan

BULACAN officials are missing the point in the concern over the use of the Special Education Fund as collateral for a loan, the non-government organization calling for the investigation of the P215 million loan said, adding that the Land Bank giving clearance to the loan was expected.

The Movement for Responsible Enterprise in a statement said Bulacan Gov. Josefina de la Cruz missed the meat of their concern, saying there was no question on the need for more classrooms but using the special fund as collateral in a loan even for school houses is another story.

The advocacy group also said it was not surprised the LBP justified the loan, explaining that the LBP is party to the transaction.

"It is bad enough that the loan violated rules in the use of the SEF. It is worse because the P215 million used in the loan could have been used to improve the farmer's lot."

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Attack on bet's house signals Abra poll violence

LAGAYAN, Abra—Two relatives of a candidate for vice mayor in this town were wounded after armed men threw Molotov cocktails at the house of the candidate in Barangay Poblacion here on Friday night, police reports said.

Police said the suspects also shot the house of Cipriano Lapez, who is running for vice mayor of this town.

Joel Lapez and Monina Lapez, relatives of Lapez, were wounded in the explosion.

Reports said at least 14 family members were at the house when the suspects attacked at about 11:30 p.m. Friday.

A source in this town said the Lapez family decided not to file an official statement with the police and would not file a case against the suspects for fear of retaliation.

The source said the family members failed to attend a scheduled peace covenant signing in Bangued town on Monday because of fears that they might be attacked on their way to the capital town.

The Commission on Elections has classified Lagayan as an "area of immediate concern" for this year's election period.

Since 1998, at least five election-related or politically motivated killings have been recorded in the town.

Genaro Batalla, a candidate for councilor, was gunned down in May 1998. On Jan. 2, 2001, Councilor Leonardo Parado was also killed. Three village councilors were also killed in the town in 2001 and 2002.

In Bangued town, Gov. Vicente Valera said categorizing Abra as an election hot spot was "unfair" because cases of election-related violence in the province during the past elections were "isolated."

"There are at least three towns that can be called 'hot spots' but this does not make the entire province (an election) hot spot," Valera said.

During the 2001 elections, Abra recorded the highest number of election-related violent incidents in the Cordillera. But Armando Velasco, regional Comelec director, said they are still assessing the situation in Abra, which they have classified as an "area of immediate concern."

A covenant to ensure a "clean, honest, orderly and peaceful elections" was scheduled for signing by local candidates Monday but this was postponed until Jan. 21 due to confusion on venue.

Abra Bishop Artemio Rillera and Comelec representatives are expected to witness the signing of the peace covenant that will be held at the provincial police headquarters in Camp Juan Villamor here.

Senior Supt. Artemio Hicban, Abra police director, said police have classified the towns of Lagayan, La Paz, Bangued, San Isidro, Lagangilang, San Juan, Boliney, Penarrubia and Pidigan as areas of immediate concern.

Hicban said police are preparing to reinforce security in these towns in the run-up to the elections. He said they would install checkpoints and send additional policemen to the towns if necessary.

Hicban said the classification was made based on election-related violence in past elections, peace and order situation, intense political rivalry and the presence of armed men. Some of these areas were reported to be under the influence or control of the New People's Army.

Valera and police officials in the province said they are expecting orderly and peaceful elections in the towns of Lacub, Malibcong, Pilar, San Quintin, Bucay, Manabo, Sallapadan, Dolores, Langiden, Villaviciosa and Tubo because the mayoral candidates there are running unopposed.

PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

PNP, Army raise alert in wake of NPA attacks

BACOLOD CITY—The police and the military in Western Visayas have tightened security in vital private and public installations in the region in the wake of recent attacks by communist guerrillas.

Chief Supt. George Aliño, regional police director, yesterday ordered all provincial and city police directors in Western Visayas to initiate measures aimed at preventing further attacks.

This developed after the guerrillas burned three buses in Canlaon City in Negros Oriental and a Globe Telecom cell site in Dumarao, Capiz on Saturday.

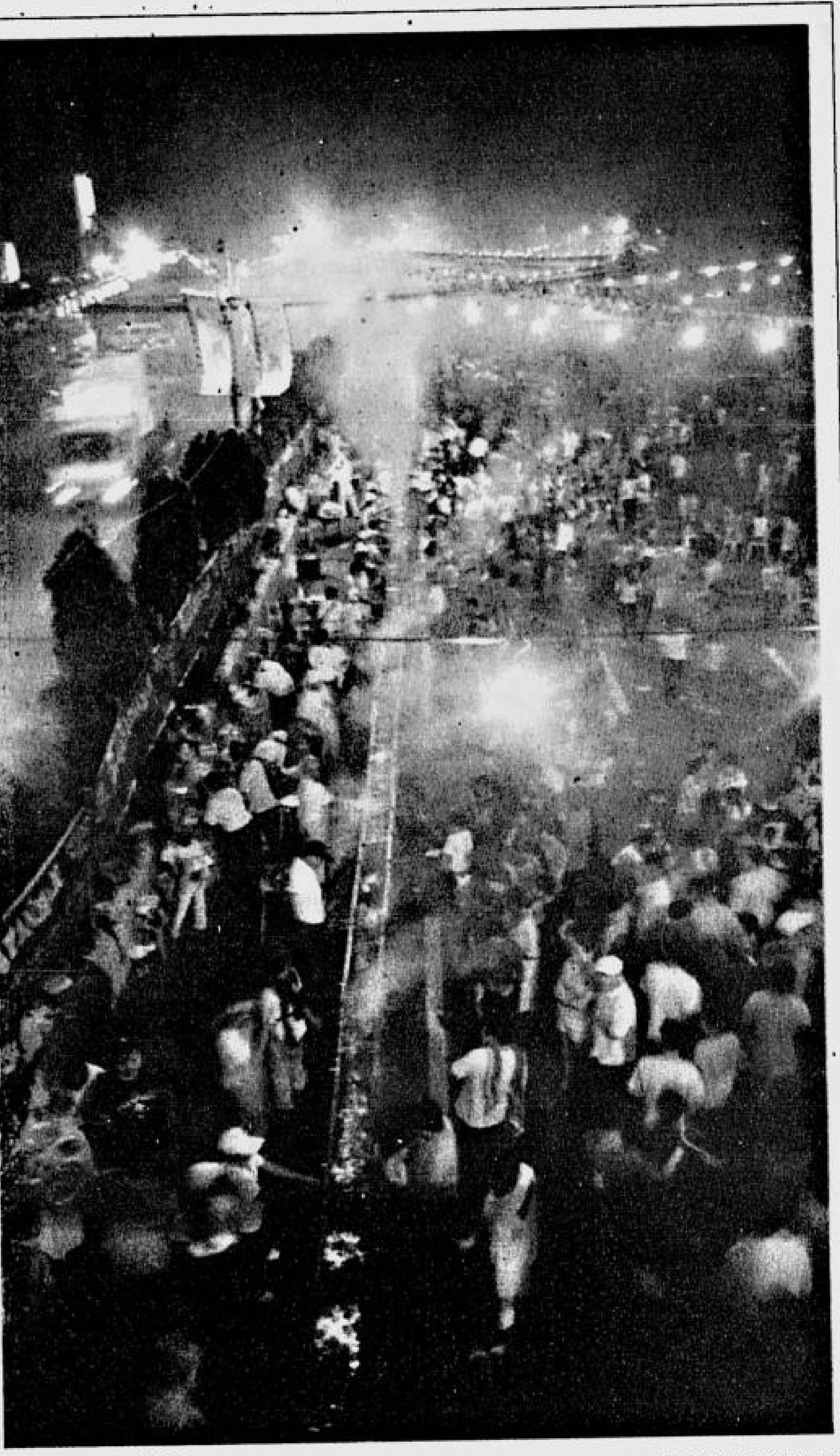
Capt. Norman Zuniega, public information officer of the Armed Forces' Central Command (Centcom) based in Cebu City, said the attacks were aimed at forcing businessmen to pay revolutionary taxes.

Earlier on Tuesday, suspected communist rebels also torched a cargo truck owned by a sugar planter in Silay City, Negros Occidental who refused to pay the rebels.

Col. Gregorio Fajardo, commanding officer of the Army's 11th Infantry Battalion based in Murcia, Negros Occidental, yesterday described the series of NPA attacks as a "desperate attempt" to boost the rebel group's "income-generating activities, through extortion."

"They want to project to (the) candidates in the (May) election(s) that they are still a force to reckon with," Fajardo said.

Negros Occidental Gov. Joseph Maranon added that the military would help secure communication towers, gasoline depots and other vital installations in the province. *Carla Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau*



RUDOLPH ALCAZAREN/INS

GUINNESS BID

Cebu's bid to land in the Guinness Book of World Records takes shape on Fuente Osmeña Boulevard, the road that connects the city's uptown and downtown, where what Cebuanos hope would be the world's longest grill was set up. The grill was measured to be at least 1.3 kilometers long.

NFA sets aside ₱4B for purchase of palay, rice

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo has instructed the National Food Authority to go full blast in its purchase of rice and palay to prepare a buffer stock for this year.

In a statement, the NFA said the President believes the country should have enough stock of rice ready for distribution in cases of natural or man-made calamities that may hit the country this year.

The statement quoted the President as citing as example the landslides and flash floods in Southern Leyte and the Caraga region.

The President said those events needed quick response from the government especially from the NFA, which has the task of ensuring the country's food security.

Ms Macapagal, the statement said, believes that the country's archipelagic terrain required enough time and transport and supply strategies to avoid isolating areas hit by calamities.

It was important for the country to have enough stock of rice to also ensure that supply and prices are stable.

Arthur Yap, NFA administrator, said in the statement that the agency has set aside P4 billion to buy at least 475,000 metric tons or 9.5 million bags of palay this year.

Yap said the bulk of the purchases should be made on the fourth quarter of the year.

"The agency has to buy some 113,525 metric tons of palay in November," he said.

Kidnappers seize, free wrong target

COTABATO CITY—Suspected members of the Pentagon kidnap for ransom gang abducted on Saturday a lumber dealer in Koronadal City and released him in Makilala, North Cotabato Monday night.

Police and military authorities said the suspects were forced to free Diosdado Caban, 49, owner of Jones Upholstery and a coco lumber shop, after learning he was the wrong guy and could not raise ransom.

Caban told the Makilala police that two unidentified men asked him for an upholstery job in Koronadal City at 7 a.m. Saturday.

While doing the job, the suspects forced him into a pickup and sped off. While inside the van, he was blindfolded after he was divested of his cash and a P38,000-worth wristwatch.

All throughout his captivity, Caban sat, slept, ate and stayed inside the vehicle.

"I couldn't recall the plate number of the heavily-tinted vehicle," he told radio station dxND in Kidapawan City.

On Monday night, the suspects decided to free Caban along the national highway in Makilala.

The Army's 6th infantry division has directed its field personnel to help police pursue the suspects believed to be members of the Pentagon gang.

Col. Julieto Ando, 6th ID spokesperson, said the division's anti-kidnapping task groups have been alerted. *Edwin Fernandez and Rosa-May de Guzman, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

'LEGITIMATE TARGETS'

NPA warns pols: No fee, no campaign

DAVAO CITY—The New People's Army (NPA) has warned politicians who will refuse to pay permit-to-campaign (PTC) fees that they will be vulnerable to attacks.

In a statement, Rigoberto Sanchez, spokesperson of the NPA's Merardo Arce Command, said candidates who refuse to pay the PTC fees will not be allowed to enter and campaign in areas of operation of the NPA.

But Sanchez said candidates can also bargain for a reduced fee.

Sanchez's statement came after members of the NPA reportedly attacked a mayor in Davao del Sur Friday.

Reports from the military said that a team of rebels was responsible for the attack on Magsaysay Mayor Arthur Davin. The reports added that Davin, who survived the attack, earned the ire of the rebels after he failed to pay the PTC fees.

Davin was riding a white Tamaraw FX after attending a fiesta when the vehicle ran over a land mine, hitting the vehicle's rear portion.

His policeman-bodyguard, SPO2 Eduardo Adlawan, was slightly injured.

Police identified two rebels, Maximo Sambong Jr. and a certain Junjun, as the ones who planted the bomb.

Sanchez said candidates should understand that without the NPA permit, would face difficulty in their campaign.

But Sanchez said even with the PTC being a matter of revolutionary policy, parties and candidates can also enter into negotiations with the rebels.

"All considerations shall be discussed and dealt with on a case-to-case basis during these negotiations," he said.

Sanchez also warned politicians against employing military or police security during campaign sorties as it would only make them legitimate targets for the NPA.

The NPA is considered a bigger threat than the bandit group Abu Sayyaf, said the military.

Southern Command chief Lt. General Roy Kyamko said with the recent attacks by communist guerrillas "we are geared more on pursuing the communist dissidents, although the alert level and vigilance is still high against the Abu Sayyaf Group."

Kyamko said the NPA in Mindanao is massing up while the Abu Sayyaf has so far been quiet.

Kyamko said the Abu Sayyaf's capability to strike another attack has been reduced.

He said several leaders of the Abu Sayyaf were either killed or arrested "and we have reduced their strength and capability to sow terror attack to about 80 percent."

Kyamko said communist rebels "enjoy media exposure through open interviews and press releases." *Anthony Allada and Julie Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Blood ties run thick in Isabela town polls ruled by few families

CABATUAN, Isabela—For one of the coastal towns in Isabela, the rule of politics is a virtual family affair.

Reelectionist Palanan Mayor Natividad Bernardo, who is seeking her third term after "inheriting" it from her husband Angel six years ago, has teamed up with her son, Angelo Bernardo, a three-term councilor in the town, under the Nationalist People's Coalition.

Mayor Bernardo is running unopposed although her son Angelo will be challenged by Councilor Rodolfo Villeta of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino for vice mayor.

Her daughter, Angelina Bernardo, is also running for councilor as well as two other close relatives, Jaime Bernardo and Rodolfo Bernardo Jr.

Palanan, one of the four coastal towns in Isabela which is accessible only by a 40-minute plane ride, six-hour boat trip or three-day hike across the Sierra Madre mountains, is best remembered as the last bastion of the late Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, president of the First Philippine Republic, in 1900 when he was captured by American forces there.

Two former mayors in Isabela will try to reclaim their posts from their wives, who took over from them when they completed three terms.

Former Mayor Atanasio Dayrit Jr. (Puwersa ng Masang Pilipino) of Cabatuan will try to succeed his wife, Alma Dayrit, who served for a single term. His rival is Vice Mayor Mario Acosta (NPC).

In Burgos town, former Mayor Felixnaldo Alabon (NPC) is competing with three other candidates to succeed his wife, Evelyn Alabon.

His opponents are retired Col. Domigno Duco (Lakas-CMD), Ruben Tegui (Aksiyon Demokratiko) and Severina Marzan (Independent).

In Benito Soliven town, former Mayor Marcelino Domingo's wife Raymunda Domingo will seek reelection against Vice Mayor Ernesto Abu (Lakas-CMD) and Isidro Siquian (LP).

Politicians' sons will also try to make their names out of their parents' shadows in some towns.

Partido ng Masang Pilipino candidate Benjamin Dy Jr., son of former Isabela Gov. Benjamin Dy Sr., filed his candidacy for Angadanan town mayor against Jose Panganiban Jr. (Aksiyon Demokratiko) and former Mayor Rogelio Siquian Jr. (LDP).

In Mallig, NPC candidate Edward Isidro, son of former Mayor Demetria Isidro, will seek his second term of office against Pedro Flores of LDP. *Villamor Visaya Jr., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Bets for Pampanga gov in legal war; NPC in disarray

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The two Nationalist People's Coalition candidates for governor in Pampanga are caught in a legal war, placing the local opposition in disarray.

Rep. Juan Pablo Bondoc (fourth district) asked the Commission on Elections to invalidate the certificate of nomination and acceptance (Cona) of Rep. Zenaida Cruz-Ducut (second district).

Bondoc, in a seven-page petition filed on Friday last week, urged the Comelec to declare him the only official candidate of the NPC for Pampanga governor in the May elections.

He also asked the Comelec to confirm his authority to nominate the official local candidates of the party, to appoint precinct and canvassing watchers and to invalidate all nominations that Ducut had made.

His petition included as evidence the Cona issued to him by Isabela Gov. Faustino Dy Jr., NPC chair, and Frisco San Juan, NPC president.

The certificate designated Bondoc as the party's official candidate. Dy and San Juan, in a letter on Jan. 5, also authorized Bondoc to make nominations and do other party-related tasks.

Bondoc noted a violation, citing Resolution No. 6453, which the Comelec issued on Dec. 10, 2003. The resolution says that "no political party shall be allowed to nominate candidates more than the number of persons required to be voted for in an elective position."

Bondoc said Ducut should be considered as an "independent candidate."

A copy of Ducut's certificate of candidacy showed she presented herself as the "official candidate" of the NPC and its local chapter, the Nagkakaisang Partido ng mga Kapampangan.

On Monday, however, Dy and San Juan advised the Comelec that the party had declared Pampanga a "free zone" for its gubernatorial candidates.

"The authority, therefore, granted to (Ducut) to nominate the official candidates of the NPC for the positions of provincial, city and municipal offices in the first, second, third and fourth districts is valid," the two NPC leaders said in a Jan. 12 letter to the Comelec.

"All candidates nominated by her, therefore, are official candidates of the NPC," Dy and San Juan said in the same letter obtained by the INQUIRER.

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INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
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ESTEVES and wife Susan. RAY ZAMBRANO

Dagupeño is California city mayor

By Gobleth Moulic
Dagupan City

THE FIRST Filipino immigrant to be elected as mayor of the City of Milpitas in Silicon Valley, California, returned to his birthplace in Dagupan City to foster goodwill and sisterhood ties between Dagupan and Milpitas.

Mayor Jose Esteves, who grew up in Barangay Bonuan Gueset, received a warm welcome from his *kabaleyan* (province-mates) and Pangasinan leaders led by Mayor Benjamin Lim and Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. when he visited the city during the Christmas holidays.

Esteves, who migrated to the United States in 1984, came back with his wife, Susan, and daughter, Irene.

He said the visit was part of a memorandum of understanding between the governments of Dagupan and Milpitas that was signed on April 15 last year.

Esteves, a graduate of the University of Pangasinan and the University of the Philippines, worked as a programmer and analyst in the US in the early 1980s.

He surprised Milpitas (pop: 65,000) when he defeated local politicians and won by a landslide in last year's elections. Before he ran for mayor, Esteves was elected as the top council member in the city.

"My victory has a big impact (in Milpitas and in California as a whole) because I'm a Filipino. When I won, the Filipino won," he said.

"I've been very proud of my roots and my country of origin. Even before I entered politics, I had been active in community service that promotes the welfare of our *kabaleyan* and our culture," he said.

Positive image

He attributed his electoral success to the "strong and positive image" of Filipino-American associations in Milpitas.

He said Fil-Ams comprise 13 percent of the city population, but they have a strong voice in the community. "(This is) simply because we are very much involved, very cooperative, assertive, visible and united," he said.

He said that in every city commission, Fil-Ams elect at least one or two Fil-Am commissioners.

"We believe that we have to be well-represented. We believe that we have a voice and we need somebody to promote cultural diversity," Esteves said.

Milpitas, according to information gathered from the Internet, is one of the oldest settlements in Santa Clara Valley. Its name was derived from the Spanish phrase "little cornfields."

The city is now an important part of the Silicon Valley industrial area and home to ethnically diverse group of residents.

Esteves said the city government had been requesting Fil-Am groups to present shows to increase awareness of the culture and sentiments of Filipinos.

He said Fil-Am members of the Lions Club, Rotary Club, Knights of Columbus, Couples for Christ, Kiwanis and other non-profit organizations always support the city-sponsored activities.

Active participant

"We are not just members of diverse groups but we actively participate. The good image (of Fil-Am groups) is very important. Maybe in other areas, they don't have that very strong positive image," he said.

Esteves said this image helps Filipinos when they enter public service. "That is why the chance for a Filipino-American to win in the elections is very high. I'm not saying it's automatic. (As long as) the potential is there, the Filipino will win. (Creating a good image) does not happen overnight. One mistake of a representative would destroy that image. I don't want that to happen. I'm just happy because we are consistent in doing our work," he said.

As international coordinator of the Pawil Dagupan (Return to Dagupan), a *balikbayan* program of Dagupan, Esteves said he has been coordinating with Dagupeños in the Bay Area and other areas in the US to support it.

Part of the memorandum of understanding signed by Vice Mayor Alvin Fernandez, who represented Lim, and Esteves is the establishment of a cultural and student exchange program.

Esteves said he also wanted to help students in Dagupan to achieve academic excellence, especially in the fields of medicine and information technology.

Reinventing the wheel of justice in N. Vizcaya

By Melvin Gascon
Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya

> *"THIS is the beginning of a new story, though; the story of a man's gradual renewal and rebirth, of his gradual transition from one world to another, of his acquaintance with a new reality of which he had previously been completely ignorant."*
>
> —Fyodor Dostoyevsky
> "Crime and Punishment"

ARMANDO (not his real name), 25, literally walked out of the provincial jail in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, one Friday afternoon, eager to see his mother who was sick.

It was not because he had been acquitted of the rape charges filed against him.

He "bolted out" due to homesickness. But as soon as prison officials ordered a manhunt, they got a phone call from him the next day. He said he wanted to go back home—to his cell.

As the centerpiece of the provincial government's program on criminal justice, the prison facility provides visitors a tangible feel-good experience on how an effective criminal justice system works in this part of the country. It is said that when tourists visited the provincial capitol, they would often be taken to jail.

SALON BAYOMBONG
13

INMATES at the provincial jail in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, give a whole new meaning to their stay at the detention center. They take on various income-generating projects to prepare for their return to mainstream society. MELVIN GASCON

Gawad Galing Pook

The program "Convergence and Complementation: A Tool for Effective Nueva Vizcaya Criminal Justice System," has earned for the province another Gawad Galing Pook award in 2003—its sixth in the last four years.

The Galing Pook (Place of Excellence) award, bestowed by the Galing Pook Foundation (GFP), in partnership with various foreign-funding agencies, aims to recognize outstanding, innovative and sustainable programs of local governments.

The foundation has credited Nueva Vizcaya's criminal justice program for the collaboration of all sectors to achieve a peaceful province, an efficient dispensation of justice, and a gentle renewal for offenders and their victims.

Since 1998, the program that redefined the justice system in the province has tackled head-on the then chronic problems of mishandled criminal cases, congested jails and abused inmates.

It was born out of the first-ever multisectoral judicial summit sponsored by the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) in Nueva Vizcaya. It soon became a regular activity, where issues on the justice system were raised and plans were drafted.

The solutions were crafted through the collaboration of government agencies and private groups, says Gov. Rodolfo Agbayani.

As stakeholders met to address a common concern, the program has borne fruit:

- Law enforcement agencies have agreed to a covenant to adopt measures to avoid lapses and delay in handling the case of an offender.
- Prosecutors and trial judges have pledged their availability at any given time of the day when their services are required.
- The Public Attorneys' Office and the IBP have plugged holes in the free legal assistance services, which evolved the thrust that made lawyers become more "service-oriented."

In the judiciary, the disposition of cases became even faster following the designation of two special courts—Regional Trial Court Branch 27 as the heinous crimes court and Branch 28 as the family court.

To complement all these efforts, the provincial government and national line agencies have pooled their resources to provide funding and logistical support to their partners in the justice system.

One-stop shop

For instance, the Dumlao Hall of Justice, which houses the five RTC branches in the province, the IBP office and the prosecutors' offices, and the Department of the Interior and Local Govern ment provincial office, was intended to become a one-stop shop for clients.

It is just a few steps from the provincial jail compound, and a few meters from the provincial police headquarters.

The provincial government shoulders part of the courthouses' maintenance costs, which, officials say, are insignificant, considering the accessibility of these offices to the people.

For example, the provincial jail saves much on not having to transport inmates and their guards to and from the courts for hearings.

The methodical management of criminal cases has also translated into one fact: the number of inmates released from and admitted to the provincial jail has struck a happy balance that has averted the rapid congestion of the detention center.

"Offenders-in-transition," Agbayani prefers to call the inmates at the provincial jail. He urges everyone to wipe away the common perception that they are fearsome criminals.

As such, inmates are free to roam the jail's premises, which earned the provincial jail here as "the jail without bars"—a home to suspected offenders while awaiting the verdict of the courts on their cases.

They busy themselves with worthwhile, income-generating activities—backyard gardening, handicraft making or construction work at government infrastructure projects. Others, especially gay inmates, have found a lucrative venture in haircut, manicure and massage services rendered to jail guards and fellow inmates.

Inmates are to be credited for the clean surroundings of the provincial capitol. Their early mornings are spent cleaning the grounds, which serve as part of their daily physical workout.

Don't be surprised too, if in one of your visits to the jail, you're greeted by the singing of a live band that could easily outperform any group you listen to in your favorite weekend hangout.

The Jailbirds

"The Jailbirds" has become a regular entertainer at various functions. Its instruments were donated by the provincial government.

All these, coupled with the proper social and spiritual guidance, prepare the inmates to become productive citizens before their expected return to society, says warden Benzon Cadiente.

The province has adopted a seven-pillar justice system, instead of the usual five. Aside from the community, law enforcement, prosecution, judiciary and correctional institutions, the Nueva Vizcaya model adds two other components: the Church and the media.

Agbayani believes in the power of the pulpit, which makes the Church stand out as a prime mover in the fight against criminality. It can give the moral touch to persons with evil minds, whether they be crooks or unscrupulous law enforcers, prosecutors or judges, or citizens who often turn blind, deaf and mute to crimes happening around them.

Instead of just being a part of the community, the media institution is recognized for its role as watchdog of any wrongdoing, such as felonies, or even breaches in the dispensation of due process of law.

Through the Nueva Vizcaya Press Club, radio and television programs on law education and crime prevention were set up, as well as discussed in national and local newspapers, to create awareness and to inform the public of the roles they have to play in the campaign against criminality.

Not to be forgotten, too, are the crime victims. To provide them justice, the program looks after their needs to enable them to cope with the shock of a criminal act, as well as the rigors of court trials.

The social welfare offices and charity institutions are being tapped to provide them counseling, temporary shelter, employment and other means of support to the victims and their families.

All these efforts of each component in the criminal justice system translate to an improved peace and order situation, and eventually a better life for Novo Vizcayanos.

'Dayo' is not just about people and places

By Paulo Rafael Subido
Lingayen, Pangasinan

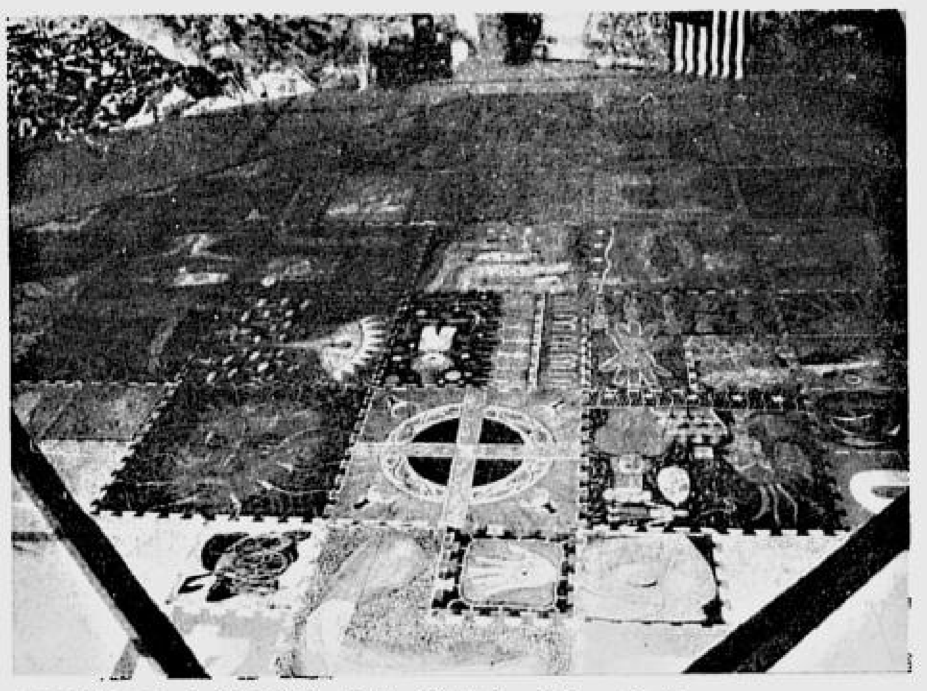
IN THE spirit of awareness, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts has been organizing exhibits throughout the country. The latest series, called the "Sungdu-an 3," brings art and artists together to different places across the archipelago.

The traveling national exhibition is organized through a process that is sensitive to the various locales, and dwells on the important issues of globalization, migration and encounters with social differences.

The exhibit titled "Dayo," held recently at the Sison auditorium in Lingayen, Pangasinan, is a project based primarily on how artists engage and integrate themselves in their adopted communities.

Artists, as some people say, are the "new nomads" as they migrate locally and globally, internally or externally.

According to Dayo curator Alfredo Aquilizan, most of the artists' projects are continuously mutating with the changes of social structures and social relationships, and also because of their integration to the community.



LEONARD Aguinaldo's "The Spirit of Saint Louis Lives On!" CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Aquilizan says this isn't just a simple case of adaptation but also "an active practice in which a person, who is the artistic agent, and the place are part of an interactive process of producing local culture."

Dayo was perhaps Lingayen's first introduction to the national art scene. It featured seven artists from Luzon, among them Baguio artists Leonard Aguinaldo and Kawayan de Guia, who are both finalists in this year's Philip Morris-sponsored art competition.

'Spirit of Saint Louis'

Their collaboration was called "The Spirit of Saint Louis Lives On!" perhaps timed for the centennial of the 1904 Saint Louis World's Fair.

De Guia recycled an advertising billboard (Baguio City is slowly being filled with billboards) and turned it into a "circus tent." Hanging his piece would have proved too difficult because of its size.

The exterior was a contrast to De Guia's murals inside, along with the centerpiece that was Aguinaldo's rubber-cut floor.

Colorful images of Cordillera culture filled the tent, and it was inevitable that a party was soon to be under way inside. The *tapuy* (rice wine) was flowing freely and passed to everyone who entered the tent.

Other pieces in the exhibit were Riel Hilario's wood and epoxy resin sculptures and Diokno Pasilan's photographs.

The Southern Tagalog Exposure, a group of artist activists, added a little shock value to the exhibit with its installation called "Porforetions" that exposed human rights violations in Southern Luzon.

A standout in the exhibit was Lirio Salvador's "220 Volts: Unison in E Major," an assemblage of experimental instruments. Salvador, a native of Cavite, brought his ensemble of instruments all made from jeepney and pedicab parts.

"Making the Local" was the theme of the Sungdu-an 3, and it was a part of the interactive process of creating culture. Person and place were changed and changed each other.

High court's 101-page decision is strongly worded

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE 101-PAGE decision of the Supreme Court included several strongly worded passages. Some excerpts:

"The Comelec awarded this billion-peso undertaking with inexplicable haste, without adequately checking and observing mandatory financial, technical and legal requirements. It also accepted the preferred computer hardware and software even if, at the time of the award, they had undeniably failed to pass eight critical requirements designed to safeguard the integrity of elections," the court said.

Non-existent group

The SC took the Comelec to task for awarding the contract to a non-existent group.

"Despite the absence of competent proof as to the existence and eligibility of the alleged consortium (MPC), its capacity to deliver the contract, and the members' joint and several liability thereof, Comelec nevertheless assumed that such consortium existed and was eligible. It then went ahead and considered the bid of MPC, to which the contract was eventually awarded, in gross violation of (the Comelec's) own bidding rules and procedures . . . Therein lies Comelec's grave abuse of discretion," the court said.

The tribunal said that the March 7, 2003 letter from MPEI president William Yu did not "itself prove the existence of the consortium."

Three deficiencies

The high court highlighted three of the MPC counting machines' glaring deficiencies: Failure to achieve "the accuracy rating criteria of 99.9995 percent" set up by the Comelec itself; failure to detect "previously downloaded results" at various canvassing or consolidation levels and to prevent these from being inputed again; and failure to print the "statutorily required audit trails of the count/canvass at different levels without any loss of data."

The SC noted that the Comelec's own Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) had noted that Mega Pacific Consortium's automated counting machines (ACMs) were not able to detect previously downloaded precinct results.

"(The) Comelec chose to ignore this crucial deficiency, which should have been a cause for the gravest concern. Come May 2004, unscrupulous persons may take advantage of and exploit such deficiency by repeatedly downloading and feeding into the computers results favorable to a particular candidate or candidates," the court said.

"We are thus confronted with the grim prospect of election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few strokes. The marvels and woes of the electronic age!," it added.

Audit trail

The court said that the consortium's ACMs were unable to print the audit trail—which is needed to "enable the Comelec to trace and verify the identities of the ACM operators responsible for data entry and downloading, as well as the times when the various data were downloaded into the canvassing system, in order to forestall fraud and to identify the perpetrators."

"This particular deficiency is significant, not only to this bidding but to the cause of free and credible elections," the SC said, noting that audit trails are specifically required by RA 8436, the law for automated elections.

"And yet, the commission simply disregarded this shortcoming and awarded the contract to private respondent, thereby violating the very law it was supposed to implement," the SC said.

The court rejected the respondents claim that these deficiencies were "mere shortcomings or minor deficiencies in software or programming, which can be rectified."

Borra's admission

"Clearly, none of the respondents bothered to think the matter through. Comelec simply took the word of the BAC as gospel truth, without even bothering to inquire from the (Department of Science and Technology) whether it was true that the deficiencies noted could possibly be remedied by pre-programming the software. Apparently, Comelec did not care about the software, but focused only on purchasing the machines," it said.

The SC also said that it was particularly dismayed by Commissioner Resurreccion Borra's admission before the court that the software being used by Comelec was merely a "demo" version, since the final version to be used in the elections was "still being developed and had not yet been finalized."

"It is not yet clear when the final version of the software would be ready for testing and deployment. It seems to the court that Comelec is just keeping its fingers crossed and hoping the final product would work," the court said.

Software not yet created

"Keeping in mind that the contract involves the acquisition of not just the ACMs or the hardware, but also the software that would run them, it is now even clearer that the contract was awarded without Comelec having seen, much less evaluated, the final product—the software that would finally be utilized come election day. What then is the point of conducting the bidding, when the software that was the subject of the contract was still to be created and could conceivably undergo innumerable changes before being considered as being final in form?" it said.

It added: "Why is it that machines are already being brought in and paid for, when there is yet no way of knowing if the final version of the software would be able to run them properly, as well as canvass and consolidate the results in the manner required?

Unrealistic specs

The SC also hit the Comelec for requiring "unrealistic specifications" that cannot be met—like the 99.9995 percent accuracy rating.

"The court stresses that the essence of public bidding is violated by the practice of requiring very high standards or unrealistic specifications that cannot be met . . . only to be watered down after the bid has been awarded," the court said.

"Such scheme, which discourages the entry of prospective bona fide bidders, is in fact a sure indication of fraud in the bidding, designed to eliminate fair competition. Certainly, if no bidder meets the mandatory requirements, standards or specifications, then no award should be made and a failed bidding declared," it added.

SC ruling leaves May polls in a mess

From page A1

modernization contract, after the P6-billion contract for voters' registration awarded to the Photokina group.

"Though the Philippines needs an automated electoral process, it cannot accept just any system shoved into its bosom through improper and illegal methods. As the saying goes, the end never justifies the means. Penumbral contracting will not produce enlightened results," wrote Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban, the decision's *ponente*.

Resignation calls

Two politicians immediately called for the election commissioners to resign. "The whole commission should resign and bow their heads in shame," presidential candidate Raul Roco said.

The new Senate majority leader, Sen. Francis Pangilinan, also called on top Comelec officials to quit, saying there were now doubts about the commission's "capacity to fulfill its mandate of ensuring fraudulent-free elections."

Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr. applauded the "wisdom" of the tribunal's decision, which he called "a triumph of the rule of law."

"As we had warned before, the contract for the award of the automated counting machines was patently illegal, apart from the strong doubts as to the integrity and capability of the equipment and the danger of automated vote-padding or *dagdag-bawas*.

In Malacañang, President Macapagal-Arroyo said she would abide by the court's decision, at the same time expressing confidence that the elections would be held as scheduled on May 10.

"This is something that has been decided by the Supreme Court and at this point there is probably nothing much that can be done except accept the decision," presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said.

Bunye said Ms Macapagal was taking the agency's word that elections can be held as scheduled on the second Monday of May.

"In this particular situation, the Comelec has affirmed that they are ready to make the proper adjustments so we'll give the Comelec a chance to do their work. I believe, and this is still the belief of many, that the elections can still be held on the regular scheduled date," Bunye said.

Nine justices

Panganiban was joined by eight other justices in junking the contract while three justices—Dante Tinga, Adolfo Azcuna and Renato Corona, all appointees of President Macapagal—dissented.

Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. and Justice Jose Vitug wanted more time to decide on the issue and wrote separate opinions.

"For the automation of the counting and canvassing of ballots in the 2004 elections, the Comelec awarded the contract to 'Mega Pacific Consortium,' an entity that had not participated in the bidding. Despite this grant, the poll body signed the actual automation contract with 'Mega Pacific eSolutions Inc.,' a company that joined the bidding but had not met the eligibility requirements," the court said.

"Comelec has not merely gravely abused its discretion in awarding the contract... It has also put at grave risk the holding of credible and peaceful elections by shoddily accepting electronic hardware and software that admittedly failed to pass legally mandated technical requirements," the court said.

"For these reasons, the court finds it totally unacceptable and unconscionable to place its imprimatur on this void and illegal transaction that seriously endangers the breakdown of our electoral system," it added.

Recover funds from payee

Besides voiding the contract with MPEI, the tribunal also nullified the Comelec resolution that awarded the contract to Mega Pacific Consortium and told the commission "to refrain from implementing any other contract or agreement entered into with regard to this project."

"The public funds expended... must therefore be recovered from the payees and/or from the persons who made possible the illegal disbursements, without prejudice to possible criminal prosecutions against them," the court said.

A WAREHOUSE-FUL of automated voting machines is rendered useless by the Supreme Court decision to nullify the "highly irregular" contract entered into by the Comelec with its supplier, the Mega-Pacific consortium. ERIK ARAZAS

"Futhermore, Comelec and its officials concerned must bear full responsibility for the failed bidding and award, and held accountable for the electoral mess wrought by their grave abuse of discretion in the performance of their functions," it said.

Comelec's failure

The high court emphasized the need for a Comelec that can be depended on to make the right decisions.

"True, our country needs to transcend our slow, manual and archaic electoral process. But before it can do so, it must first have a diligent and competent electoral agency that can properly and prudently implement a well-conceived automated election system," the court said.

"Before our country can hope to have a speedy and fraud-free election, it must first be able to procure the proper computerized hardware and software legally, based on transparent and valid system of public bidding," it said.

"At (the case's) core is the ability and capacity of the Commission on Elections to perform properly, legally, and prudently its legal mandate to implement the transition from manual to automated elections. Unfortunately, the Comelec has failed to measure up to this historic task," the court added.

Decision rushed

Supreme Court spokesperson Ismael Khan Jr. said the court tried its best to rule on the pressing issue as soon as the Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines and other petitioners questioned the contract before the court on Aug. 8.

"Compared with the other cases, this one was expedited," Khan said.

He said that while the case was "complicated," the court dissected the issues and facts involved with the help of Chief Justice Davide, who is a former Comelec chairman.

"Our position is that corruption thrives in our country because we allow it. We just chose not to allow it and so we blew the whistle," said Augusto Lagman, one of the complainants.

Dilemma

Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos said he had yet to read the court ruling but said "definitely it is a setback."

The National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel), a civilian body deputized to ensure honest conduct of elections, said the ruling has "put the credibility of Comelec in question."

"The decision has placed all of us in some kind of dilemma," Namfrel director Guillermo Luz said. But Luz told Reuters Comelec still had time to revert to a manual count on May 10.

About 450,000 candidates are expected to contest more than 12,000 national, congressional and local posts. The 90-day campaign period starts Feb. 10.

Appeal possible

Khan said the decision could be appealed within 15 days after the respondents receive their copies of the ruling.

Abalos said no decision had been made on whether to appeal.

But Senate President Franklin Drilon urged the commission not to do so anymore but instead concentrate on preparing for a manually counted ballot so as not to delay the elections.

Opposition reaction

The ruling elated the opposition in the Senate.

"The vote of the Supreme Court is a vote for good sense and we welcome it," Sen. Edgardo Angara told reporters.

"It's a blessing in disguise," said Minority Leader Vicente Sotto III.

Angara repeated his reasons he opposed the automated polls.

He said there were not enough counting machines to distribute nationwide and there was "not enough" information and education provided to the people on how to go about automated polls.

"We're much better off with the manual system of counting of votes," Angara said, as he noted that the risk of holding automated polls was high.

Lack of information

Sotto said the high court decision was "very good because we're not prepared" for automated polls.

"The voting population needs at least six months to be informed about automated polls," Sotto said, as he pointed out the fact that until now Comelec has not been able to prepare to inform and educate the public.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who is running for president, said he was not affected by the decision.

Lacson said his camp "is prepared for either a manual or computerized" polls.

"It doesn't matter to us," Lacson told reporters. *With reports from Juliet Javellana, Christine Avendaño, Jerome Aning; Reuters, AP, AFP*

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

2 Comelec deals shot down by SC

By PDI Research

1996— Congress passes Republic Act No. 8189 (Voters Registration Act of 1996) providing for the modernization and computerization of the registration list and the appropriation of funds "to establish a clean, complete, permanent and updated list of voters."

The Commission on Elections promulgates Resolution No. 00-0315 approving in principle the Voters Registration and Identification System project (VRIS), which envisions a computerized database system for the May 2004 elections.

1998— Congress passes RA 8436, which authorizes the Comelec to use and provide funds for an automated election system in the elections of May 11, 1998, and in subsequent national and local electoral exercises.

Sept. 9, 1999—The Comelec issues invitations to pre-qualify and bid for the supply and installation of information technology equipment and ancillary services for the VRIS.

After pre-qualifying and taking part in the public bidding, Photokina Marketing Corp. is declared winner with its bid of P6.588 billion.

Sept. 28, 2000—The Comelec issues Resolution No. 3252 approving the notice of award to Photokina. Commissioner Mehol K. Sadain and lawyer Rodrigo D. Sta. Ana, representing the Comelec and Photokina, respectively, proceed to formalize the contract.

But under RA 8760, the budget appropriated by Congress for the Comelec modernization project is only P1 billion and the actual available funds under the Certificate of Availability of Funds issued by the Comelec chief accountant is only P1.2 billion.

December 2000—Comelec Chair Harriet Demetriou issues a memorandum to the Comelec en banc expressing her objections to the contract.

Feb. 2, 2001—The terms of Demetriou and Commissioners Julio Desamito and Teresita Dy-Liacco Flores expire, and their successors are named: Alfredo Benipayo as chair and Resurreccion Borra and Florentino Tuason, Jr. as commissioners. Benipayo later announces that the VRIS has been "scrapped, dropped, junked, or set aside."

October 2001—Photokina files with the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 215 a petition for mandamus, prohibition and damages (with prayer for temporary restraining order, preliminary prohibitory injunction and preliminary mandatory injunction) against the Comelec and all its commissioners.

Dec. 19, 2001—RTC Branch 215 Judge Ma. Luisa Quijano-Padilla grants Photokina's petition for a writ of preliminary prohibitory injunction.

The Comelec files a motion for reconsideration, which is denied on Feb. 8, 2002. Benipayo and two other commissioners file a petition for certiorari with the Supreme Court.

June 10, 2002— Benjamin Abalos is appointed Comelec chair replacing Benipayo.

Sept. 18, 2002—The Supreme Court rules that Photokina cannot compel the Comelec to formalize the contract, and that because its bid is beyond the amount appropriated by Congress for the VRIS, the proposed contract is void.

The court also rules that the Comelec cannot be compelled to discharge a duty involving the exercise of judgment and discretion, especially where disbursement of public funds is concerned.

Feb. 17, 2003—The Comelec issues invitations to bid and file requests for proposal for counting machines to be used in the 2004 elections.

It requires bidders to submit financial statements for the past three years and to show a track record of an IT project with a value of P100 million. It also requires that the counting machines should have been used in at least one political exercise with no less than 20 million voters.

Feb. 18, 2003—The Comelec conducts the pre-bid conference. Of 57 interested parties that paid P15,000 for bid documents, only two were found qualified: the Mega Pacific and the Total Information Management-led consortium.

Feb. 27, 2003—Mega Pacific eSolutions, a Korean-led consortium, is incorporated.

April 15, 2003—The Comelec awards to Mega Pacific the P1.3-billion contract to supply 2,500 counting machines.

May 15, 2003—An open letter to Abalos is published in the INQUIRER urging the Comelec to look into the winning bid. Among the issues raised are the eligibility of the winning bidder, its alleged failure to meet technical requirements, and supposed flaws in the bidding, testing and evaluation process.

The letter is signed by the IT Foundation of the Philippines, the Philippine Electronics and Telecoms Federation of the Philippines, the Government for IT, the IT Association of the Philippines, and the Philippine Association of Data Entry Companies.

May 17, 2003—The Comelec says the winning bid stands, with Abalos insisting that the procedure that led to the awarding of the contract to Mega Pacific is aboveboard. The National Movement for Free Elections supports the Comelec stand, but says the real test will come in July when 30 counting machines are delivered for use in training personnel.

Namfrel chair Jose Concepcion says the Comelec should test the machines in front of interested parties to "prove they work."

May 25, 2003—Ma. Corazon Akol—a member of the Namfrel and of the technical advisory council to the Comelec, president of the Philippine Association of Data Entry, and past president of the Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines (ITFP)—writes another open letter urging the Comelec to reevaluate the winning bid. Citing documents from the Securities and Exchange Commission as well as the Comelec requirements, Akol notes that Mega Pacific was incorporated only a few days after the pre-bid conference.

Aug. 5, 2003—The ITFP, along with eight private individuals including former ITFP president and Comelec computerization technical consultant Augusto Lagman, files a petition with the Supreme Court against the Comelec officials and the contractor for allegedly breaking bidding rules.

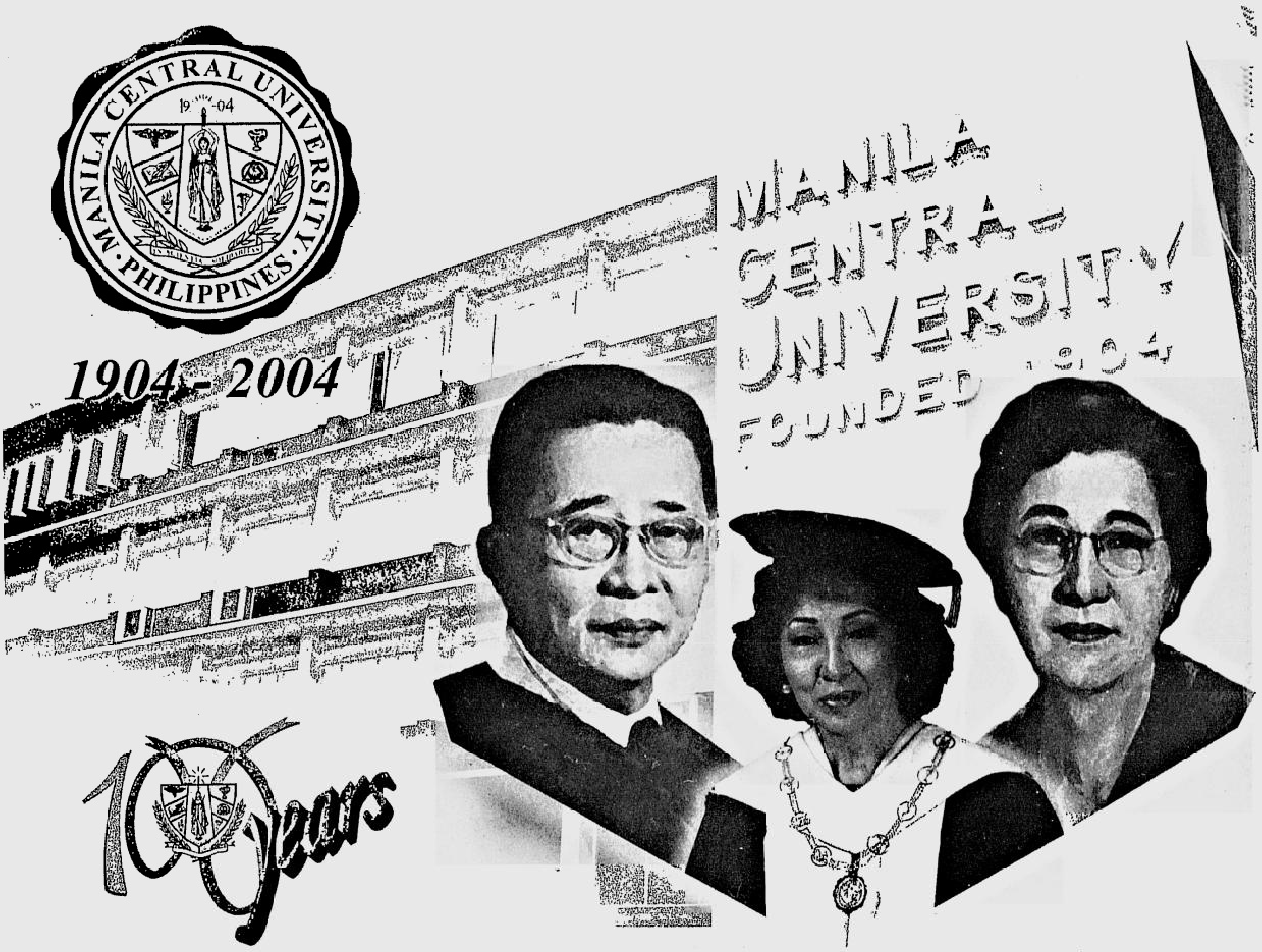
Oct. 28, 2003—After consulting with members of Congress, the Comelec issues Resolution No. 6389 declaring partial automation in the May 2004 elections.

The selected areas are the National Capital Region; provinces of Cebu, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Rizal and Pampanga; Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, including cities of Isabela and Cotabato; and cities of Baguio, Bacolod, Iloilo and Cagayan de Oro.

Dec. 4, 2003—The Comelec announces that nationwide computerized elections will be held in May 2004. Earlier, it is learned that a congressional joint resolution amending the Election Automation Law of 1997 that provides for selected automation has not been transmitted for action to Malacañang.

Jan. 13, 2004—The Supreme Court declares null and void the contract between the Comelec and Mega Pacific.

Sources: PDI archives, Comelec webpage, Supreme Court decision



COMMITMENT TO THE FILIPINO THROUGH EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MANILA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY
ANNOUNCES
THE CERMONIES MARKING THE COMMENCEMENT
OF ITS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
ON THE 14TH OF JANUARY, WEDNESDAY, 2004
PROGRAM BEGINS AT EIGHT IN THE MORNING.

THANKSGIVING MASS & FLAG RAISING CEREMONIES
8:00 AM . UNIVERSITY GYMNASIUM

THANKSGIVING MASS

MAIN CELEBRANT - MOST REV. DEOSGRACIAS S. INIGUEZ, JR. D.D.

CONCELEBRANT - REV.FR. RUFINO P. YABUT
REV.FR. RANILLO S. TRILLANA
REV.FR. GUILLERMO RAMO

FLAG RAISING CEREMONIES

UNVEILING OF ATTY. FILEMON D. TANCHOCO, SR. COMMEMORATIVE BAS - RELIEF

OPENING PROGRAM
10:00 AM . UNIVERSITY GYMNASIUM

PROCESSIONAL MARCH

WELCOME REMARKS - DR. LUALHATI TANCHOCO-GONZALEZ
PRESIDENT, MCU

OPENING REMARKS - MRS. LUNINGNING TANCHOCO ESTANISLAO
EVP AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

INTERMISSION NUMBER - MCU CHORALE

INTRODUCTION OF KEYNOTE SPEAKER - DR. ESPERANZA F. RIVERA
CHAIR, OPERATING CEREMONIES COMMITTEE

KEYNOTE SPEECH - BRO. ROLANDO DIZON
CHAIR, COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

AWARDING OF PLAQUE OF APPRECIATION - DR. LUALHATI TANCHOCO-GONZALEZ
DR. ESTELA MARIE C. TANCHOCO
DR. ESPERANZA F. RIVERA

CLOSING REMARKS - DR. FELICIANA A. REYES

RECESSIONAL MARCH

DEAN LINA SALARDA
MASTER OF CEREMONIES

SECOND PURIFICACION V. GALLEGO-TANCHOCO MEMORIAL LECTURE
1:30 PM - TANCHOCO AUDITORIUM

INVOCATION - RENATO C. TANCHOCO, MD
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE - DR. ARISTOTLE T. MALABANAN
VP-ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS

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CHAIR, MCU CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

MEMORIAL LECTURE - HON. MARIAN M. ANDALUZ
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AWARDING OF TOKEN OF APPRECIATION - DR. LUALHATI TANCHOCO-GONZALEZ
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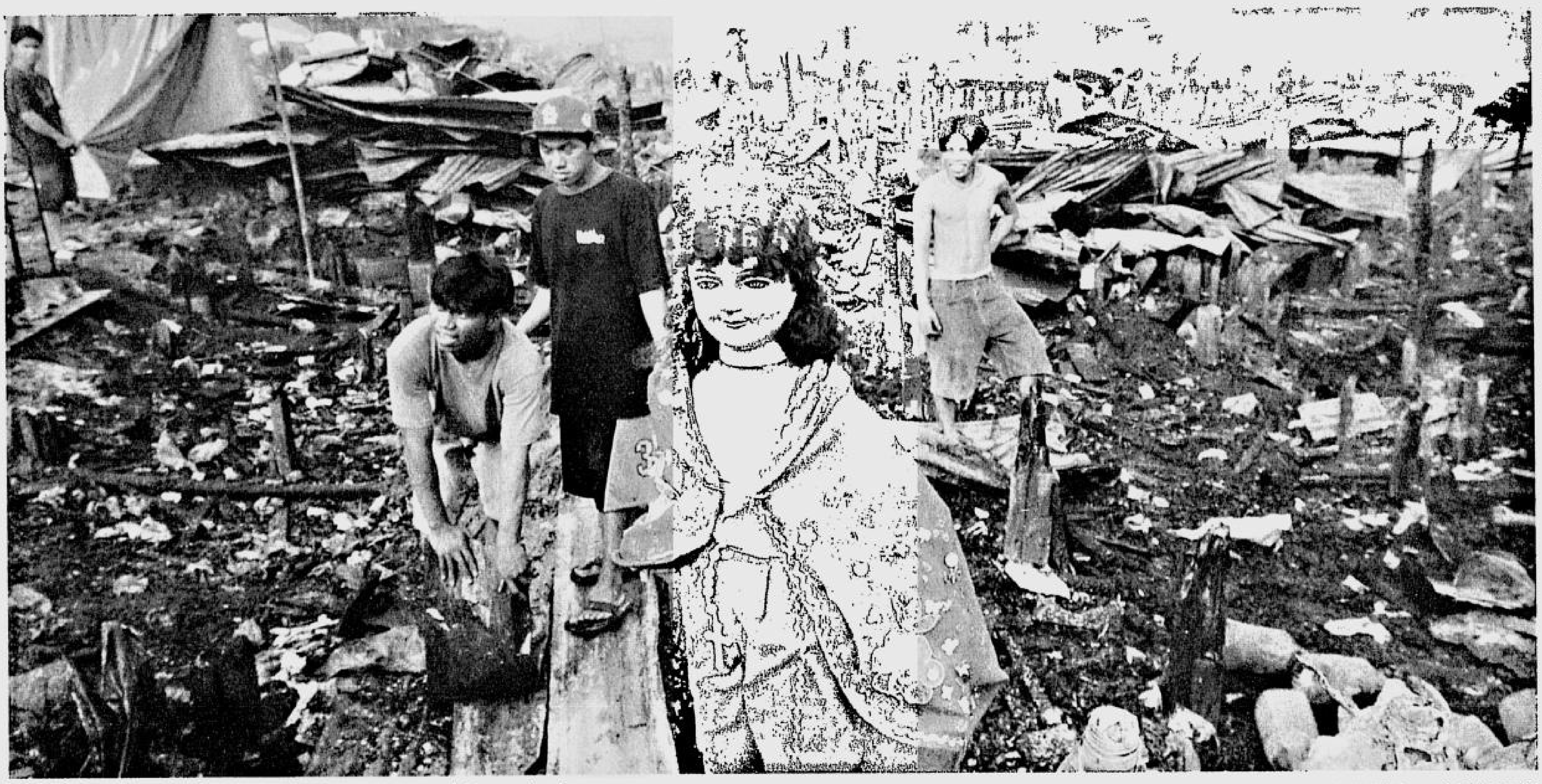

AN IMAGE of the Sto. Niño stands on a patch of land that was laid waste in a fire.

PHOTOS BY ERIK ARAZAS

Aid starts to pour in for Baseco victims

By Leila Salaverria and Tarra Quismundo

THE BASECO Compound in Port Area, Manila—site of a recent fire that destroyed more than 2,500 homes—has been declared a calamity area.

As disaster relief started pouring in for the stricken residents, the couple who reportedly owned the house where the fire started, has sought police protection against some neighbors whom they claimed were out to get them.

Zaldy Eusebio, 32, and wife Racquel, 30, told police that the fire did start in their house, but they were not fighting at the time the fire broke out, contrary to television reports.

The Eusebios went to the Western Police District at 8:10 a.m. yesterday accompanied by Tomasemerito Magdangal from the Malacañang Protocol Office.

The couple wanted to go on record that they have been receiving threats from neighbors who were blaming them for starting the nine-hour blaze that destroyed P40 million worth of property and left thousands homeless, according to Insp. Cresencio Martin, Deputy Chief of the WPD-GAS.

Although they stressed that they are not in hiding, they said they were persuaded to leave the Baseco area because some of their neighbors were out to get them, Martin said.

Racquel told Insp. Martin that when she woke up Sunday night, she saw flames engulfing their room.

The Manila City Council yesterday issued a resolution placing the affected portion of the Baseco (Bataan Shipyard and Engineering Company) Compound in a state of calamity.

The resolution would enable the city government to funnel emergency funds to the affected area.

The fire that began on Sunday night and went on until 8 a.m. on Monday destroyed some 2,500 structures, and left around 4,500 families homeless.

Since Monday, City Hall has been providing meals to the victims. Different non-government organizations have also volunteered aid for the victims.

FATHER and son find shelter in a warehouse after spending a long day gathering what remained of their belongings.

A BOY accepts a bowl of noodles from aid providers.

Jose Baranda of Manila's Department of Social Welfare said that they have extended the three-day feeding program for the fire victims.

Baranda also said that they are continuing with the census of residents who lost their homes in the fire.

"We need to have an accurate count to identify the legitimate residents," Manila Mayor Joselito Atienza Jr. said in a statement.

"(The census record) would be the basis for the development plan that we would formulate and implement in the area," the mayor's statement explained.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Wednesday, January 14, 2004
1st Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: 1S 3:1-10, 19-20
Gospel: Mk 1:29-39

As soon as Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon and Andrew with James and John. As Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever, they immediately told him about her. Jesus went to her and taking her by the hand, raised her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening at sundown, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had evil spirits: the whole town was pressing around the door. Jesus healed many who had various diseases, and drove out many demons; but he did not let them speak, for they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, before daylight, Jesus went off to a lonely place where he prayed. Simon and the others went out, too, searching for him; and when they found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you." Then Jesus answered, "Let's go to the nearby villages so that I may preach there too; for that is why I came."

So Jesus set out to preach in all the synagogues throughout Galilee; he also cast out demons.

Commentary

When fame begins to catch up on him Jesus heads for the mountains or for a lonely place (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16; 6:12; Jn 6:3,15). In today's reading, when they told him everyone was looking for him he said, "Let's go somewhere else." There is a wrong kind of fame. Someone famously said that nowadays everyone can be famous for a quarter of an hour! Many people do everything they can to be famous, and some even resort to criminal acts. Having perhaps a deficient sense of identity they crave for notice: the notice of a crowd will persuade them that they exist. But on a smaller scale we all want to have our existence noted by at least a few people. Anyone who can live even for a while in a desert must have (or must develop) a powerful sense of their own existence. More profoundly they discover that their existence is not just a dull fact but a mysterious activity welling up from God moment by moment. Some people discover this in the desert of a prison, but all of us can discover it in a moment of solitude.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

CRIMINAL LAW (MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES)—Voluntary surrender—Accused-appellant finally contends that the trial court should have considered the mitigating circumstance of voluntary surrender in his favor. He explains that he voluntarily surrendered to the Barangay Captain, and willingly went with him and complainant's relatives to the police station. We are not persuaded. A surrender to be voluntary must be spontaneous, showing the intent of the accused to submit himself unconditionally to the authorities, either because he acknowledges his guilt, or he wishes to save them the trouble and expense necessarily incurred in his search and capture. If none of these two reasons impelled the accused to surrender, because his surrender was obviously motivated more by an intention to insure his safety, his arrest being inevitable, the surrender is not spontaneous. The conduct of accused-appellant after the commission of the offense, of running away after having been stabbed by private complainant and of fleeing from complainant's relatives when they tried to bring him to the authorities, do not show voluntary surrender as contemplated under the law. It appears that accused-appellant willingly went to the police authorities with the barangay captain only to escape the wrath of private complainant's relatives who were pursuing him and who appeared to be thirsting for his blood. [Citations omitted.] [Justice Bellosillo, Second Division, People vs Basite, G. R. No. 150382, October 2, 2003]

BY R. B. VERA

Another fire hits Caloocan City

FIRE razed a parlor, a canteen and a tailoring shop in Caloocan City early yesterday morning.

The fire began at about 12:30 a.m. yesterday in a canteen in Phase I, Bagong Silang, Caloocan City.

Investigators said the fire started when an electric line in the canteen sparked.

The fire rapidly spread to nearby stalls—a parlor and a tailoring shop.

Nobody was reported injured in the fire, which firefighters put out about 30 minutes later.

Fire officials pegged property damage at P200,000.

Edson Tandoc Jr.

NBI steps into Nievera case

By Leila Salaverria

THE NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation has issued summons for singer Bert Nievera and his wife, Carol, to make them explain the financial problems of the Country Waffles chain of restaurants, following a complaint of one of their investors.

A ranking NBI official yesterday said that the subpoenas were sent out last week, shortly after the couple reportedly left for the United States.

The NBI sent out the summons following a complaint from one of the Nieveras' investors. The complainant said the couple failed to pay the interest on her investment, said the NBI official who requested anonymity.

The complaint was lodged before Christmas, at around the time the Nieveras reportedly left for the United States.

According to the source, the investor had shelled out P19 million for the development of the Country Waffles restaurants, of which the Nieveras are the franchisees in the Philippines. There are four Country Waffles restaurants in the country and they are located in Greenhills in San Juan, Quezon City, Makati and Alabang.

The NBI official said the investor had been promised that she would be paid 6.5 percent of her investment monthly. The amount, however, was not delivered as promised.

The source also denied television reports that the NBI had forced other investors in the venture to file complaints against the Nievera couple.

"We never solicit complaints," the official said.

The source added that they are looking into the Country Waffles fiasco based on the complaint they had received, and not for anything else.

The Nieveras reportedly flew to the United States before the holidays, leaving behind millions in unpaid debts. Some of those the couple had enticed to invest in their venture are show biz figures.

The Nieveras also reportedly failed to pay the salaries of some Country Waffles employees, prompting some of the workers to take things from the restaurant.

It was the 3rd time he lost a home to fire

FOR NEARLY two hours, Georgie Tenolete was chest deep in trash and water lilies as he swam in a filthy tributary of the Pasig River.

From there, he watched as flames engulfed his house at dawn on Monday.

"I was beside a neighbor, whose house was already burning, and I told him 'look, my house is next,'" said Tenolete, a 33-year-old stevedore who first came to the Baseco Compound in 1986.

His house was one of 2,500 structures that were razed by an eight-hour blaze at the Bataan Shipyard and Engineering Company (Baseco) Compound at the Port Area in Manila.

As the sun rose that fateful Monday morning, it showed residents the extent of the tragedy that, for the third time, hit the 52-hectare compound, a land mass separated from Manila's mainland.

The first time fire broke out was on March 30, 2002, where five blocks of the 18-block compound were razed. Each block measured around two to three hectares.

Tenolete recalled that three lives were lost in the first fire.

A year later, on March 6, 2003, fire again struck, engulfing homes in three blocks of the compound.

This time, five were killed, said Tenolete, chair of Kabalikat, an organization of Baseco residents.

But while nobody died in Monday's fire, it has been the biggest, since some 4,500 families lost their homes, some made of wood, others multi-level concrete structures.

Reports said that some P40 million in property were reduced to ashes.

In Tenolete's case, his one-story, wooden house on block 16, where he, his wife and 4 kids lived, was lost.

"When we saw the fire at Block 14, we went there to help the families salvage their belongings. Then the fire became bigger so I hurried back," related Tenolete in Filipino.

After his 10-minute walk back to his house, which was on the edge of the breakwater, he already saw the fire billow like a bright yellow tornado eating its way toward his house.

He then told his family to pack up and board a rescue from the Coast Guard.

Tenolete then jumped into the water from where he watched the inferno.

It pained him to see his home lost again to fire, but at least no lives were lost this time. And that somewhat makes it easier to rebuild.

Tarra Quismundo

Girl, 12, killed by backhoe

By Leila B. Salaverria

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD Jeralyn Entines went to the Smokey Mountain in Tondo hoping to earn a living. It, however, led to her dying.

Entines, who was supposed to graduate from the sixth grade in March, was busy picking through heaps of garbage when a backhoe that was leveling the trash hit her in the back.

PO1 Jericho Jimenez said Entines went to the dump with her 10-year-old brother and some friends yesterday morning to gather scrap and other recyclable materials in an effort to help their parents earn a living.

At about 10 a.m., the girl strayed near the backhoe operated by Rafael Torres, 44.

Her brother later told reporters that he and his friends saw that Entines was already standing under the machine's clawed, metal bucket so they called out to Torres.

"*Manong, teka lang, teka lang* (Mister, wait, wait)!" he recalled yelling at the operator, to no avail.

The metal bucket used in scooping garbage already hit the girl in the nape. Entines was then dragged for several meters before getting buried in a pile of refuse.

Torres, who surrendered to the police after learning of the incident, said that he did not see the girl amid the mounds of garbage.

He added that the noise of the backhoe's engine prevented him from hearing the other children's cries.

He said that he had always told scavengers to move away from his backhoe.

Jeralyn's mother, Analisa, 30, said that she had been telling her daughter to stop joining her scavenger friends who frequent the dump site. However, she said her daughter insisted on joining the scavengers in order to earn extra money.

Jeralyn is the eldest of housewife Analisa's seven children, the youngest of whom is a year old. Analisa's husband also works as a scavenger.

Knock, knock... holdup!

By Luige del Puerto

IF SOMEONE knocks on the door and introduces himself as a repairman sent to fix your phone, make sure that somebody did ask for help from the telephone company.

Four persons pretending to be telephone company employees took away P400,000 worth of jewelry from the home of a soft drink executive in Mandaluyong City on Monday.

Jolina Oblea, 25, daughter of a Coca Cola plant manager, told the police that the robbers, who included a woman, arrived at their home on Busilak Street, Barangay Barangka Drive at 7:45 a.m.

One of the suspects introduced himself as a repairman.

Unsuspecting, Oblea allowed them in.

Two of the four visitors went to the second floor and pretended to be checking the telephone box.

Minutes later, one of the suspects pulled out a handgun and asked her where she was keeping her jewelry.

After handing over her valuables, the robbers tied her hands and feet before leaving.

Oblea refused to disclose her father's full name.

But PO2 Ricomario Sta. Maria said the police doubt the victim.

The police are wondering why Oblea allowed the robbers in when their phone was working well, Sta. Maria said.

The robbers were not even wearing uniforms, he added.

The police officer said what got him particularly curious was that the victim's phone was from a company different from the one where the suspects claimed to have worked for. Sta. Maria said he was investigating further.

BACLARAN CLEANUP DRIVE

Marines pitted against vendors

By Margaux Ortiz

A TEAM of Marines has been deployed in the Baclaran area in Parañaque City to help preserve peace and order and protect policemen and Metropolitan Manila Development Authority employees in their anti-illegal vendor clearing operations.

According to Parañaque police Chief Supt. Ronald Estilles, the Marine team was deployed by the National Capital Regional Command last December to help protect Baclaran, a place of convergence considered vulnerable to criminal and terrorist activities.

With the recent spate of violence in Baclaran involving suspected illegal vendors, Estilles said the Marines had been invaluable in restoring order in the area.

On Dec. 27, three juvenile vendors torched an MMDA outpost in Baclaran during a clash between an MMDA team and illegal hawkers.

An MMDA Organized Bus Office was also set ablaze on Jan. 1 by suspected sympathizers of illegal vendors.

A total of eight Marines, 40 policemen and 15 members of the Regional Special Action Unit now work in shifts patrolling Baclaran, Estilles said.

He told the INQUIRER that the soldiers had been providing security to lawmen tasked to dismantle illegal stalls in the area.

Yesterday, the Marines rendered another form of service to the community.

Estilles asked the Marines to help Parañaque policemen sweep the sidewalks liberated from vendors.

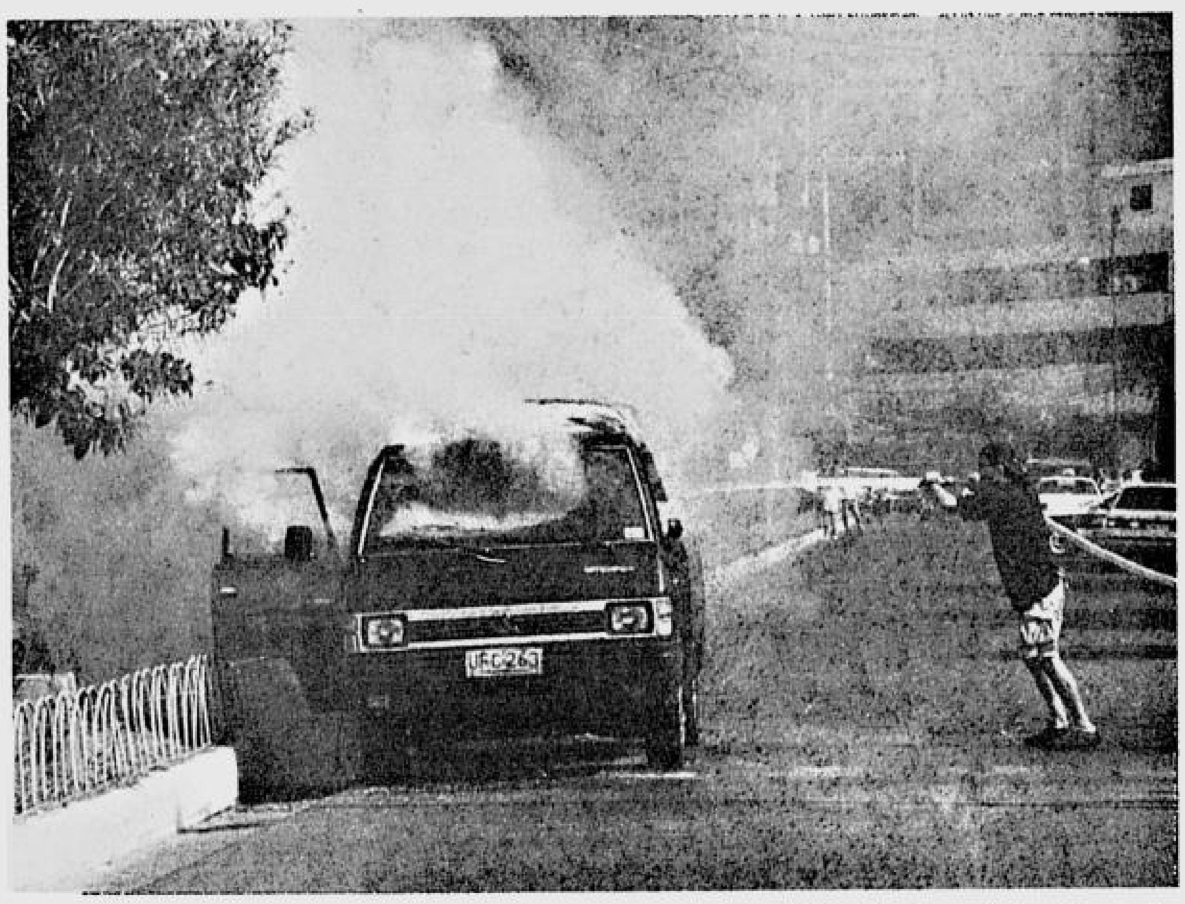
Armed with brooms provided by barangay officials of Baclaran, the Marines and the law enforcers cleared the streets and sidewalks of garbage.

"The Marines were friends with the policemen anyway, so when they saw my men cleaning the area, they readily helped," Estilles said.

The police chief added that under Southern Police District Chief Supt. Prospero Noble's directive, the policemen also told legitimate vendors to provide plastic bags where their customers could toss in their litter.

"We also put signs in the area reminding people to keep Baclaran clean," Estilles said.

He emphasized that the law enforcers were "hitting three birds with one stone" by ridding the area of illegal vendors, clearing it of trash and providing police visibility at the same time.



A FIREMAN trains his hose on a Mitsubishi L300 van that caught fire while parked along Jupiter Street, in Makati City. No one was injured. RUDY ESPERAS

Road repair kills 2 in Tondo

TWO MEN were killed, while another was critically injured when a trailer truck rammed into a truck undergoing repairs along a road in Tondo Monday night.

Killed were 18-year-old truck helper Arnulfo Sabete and 27-year-old Rene Sabete, both residents of Pier 2, North Harbor in Tondo, Manila.

Joselito Camion was hurt and was last reported fighting for his life at the Mary Johnston Hospital.

Also injured in the incident were Jimmy Agotmo and a certain Nelson, whom traffic investigators had failed to locate at press time.

SPO4 Ferlito Soler said the five men were beside a truck (TWS 802) being repaired by Arnulfo along Road 10, near the foot of the Del Pan Bridge, when a trailer truck ran into them at 9:10 p.m.

The trailer truck (TDF 189), driven by Dante Nono, 33, was traveling northward when it hit the side of the parked truck, pinning the five men in the middle.

Arnulfo was declared dead on the spot, while Rene was declared dead on arrival at the Manila Doctor's Hospital.

Nono was taken into police custody after the incident. He said in a TV interview that he hit the parked truck and the five men because he was also hit from behind by another truck. *Leila B. Salaverria*

Lorna Tolentino's bakeshop robbed

TOLENTINO

AT LEAST eight men broke into the bakery of actress Lorna Tolentino in Antipolo City and carted away P600,000 worth of equipment, a belated police report said yesterday.

Robbed was the Gals Bakery at the Castle Building on Marcos Highway near Vermont Park.

The police said the robbers took the bakery's airconditioning unit, computer, water and rice dispensers, and other equipment.

The police have charged the bakery's guard, Hermogenes Ileto with robbery.

Investigation revealed that at about 11 p.m. Jan. 7, Ileto asked Castle Building guard Manuel Aquino to look after the bakery because he was going to a birthday party in Cogeo, Antipolo.

Half an hour later, eight men with 38-caliber pistols arrived and announced the heist.

They tied Aquino and moved the equipment out of the bakery and into a waiting passenger jeepney with license plate DRM 512, a witness told the police.

Investigation showed that the jeepney was registered to one Flordeliza Tagle of Cavite, according to PO2 Marlito Rivera.

The police were able to trace Tagle in Manila, but she has reportedly refused to cooperate with police, Rivera said. She will be charged with obstruction of justice. *Luige del Puerto*

GSIS tells old lady to prove she was alive

By Tarra Quismundo

IN ONE of her random spurts of memory, 83-year-old Victoria Dumdum fondly recalled how it was like when she was still teaching in Cebu.

"I like small children. It was hard really, but you enjoy doing it," she related in between stories about her four children as she sat at the waiting area of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) office at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex in Pasay City.

A teacher for almost 30 years in several public schools in Cebu City, Dumdum came to the GSIS main office on Monday after she had been asked for a "proof of claim" of her monthly pension.

The P3,200 monthly benefit she had been receiving through a Landbank Automated Teller Machine (ATM) account was suddenly cut off, and she did not know why.

Assisted by her eldest son, Samuel, Dumdum had to walk up the second floor of the GSIS office to prove her claim.

She was aided by a cane since her knees had already grown weak due to age and an arthritis operation.

"It's her money. She paid for her pension throughout her teaching, and she should not be deprived of it," said Samuel.

His mother, who began teaching when she was 30 years old with a salary of P30, retired in 1980.

He explained that they discovered that his mother's ATM account had been amiss of her monthly pension toward the end of last year, after he opened a separate account for the money his siblings sent her from abroad.

After checking with the GSIS, Samuel said that the agency had stopped issuing her pension since September after believing that she was already dead.

Dumdum was then asked by the GSIS Pension Administration Department "to prove that she was still alive."

Samuel gathered that since April last year, the GSIS stopped giving pensions over the ATM and started issuing checks sent to addresses that were placed on their files when they first applied.

In Dumdum's case, the agency sent her checks to her former address in Lapulapu City in Cebu.

This house has been rented out since she left Cebu following her husband's death in 2001. She has since been staying with Samuel's family in Pasig City.

"And since nobody claimed the checks at the local GSIS (in Cebu), they assumed that my mother was already gone, so, they cut off her pension," said Samuel.

"But look at her, she's finding it very hard to walk because of her age," he lamented while commenting on the GSIS's request for her to prove that she was still alive.

"What about other retirees like her who are as old but do not have children or anybody to assist them?" the son added.

After coming to the GSIS, the agency promised his mother that she would again be issued her pension starting today.

"They failed to inform us of what happened to the pension. They did not give due care (in handling her pension)," said Samuel.

He said further that the GSIS was ready to rectify what happened to her mother's pension.

Fate of families affected by North rail uncertain

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

CONSTRUCTION work for the North Rail Project is expected to start in May but the relocation of affected families is still mired in uncertainty.

In Malabon City, at least three relocation sites have been considered but until now, no definite plans have been drawn up for the 2,800 families in the city to be displaced by the project.

Acting Malabon mayor Jayjay Yambao said the main problem was that the national government did not have enough funds to buy a relocation site. Another problem is where to relocate those affected.

Yambao said he would look for a site within the city.

Unlike the families in Malabon City, Valenzuela City residents who would be affected by the project now have a relocation site waiting for them, NHA General Manager Ed Pamintuan said.

Pamintuan added that clearing operations in the first eight kilometers of the project's Caloocan City to Malolos, Bulacan phase would begin this month.

Yambao, however, said that no demolitions would be implemented in Malabon City until a relocation site is approved.

On Dec. 30, 2003, the North Luzon Rail Corporation has signed a supply-contract agreement with the China National Machinery and Equipment Corporation to construct the first phase of the project.

Erratum

IN A PUBLIC service story published yesterday titled, "A hole you can help fill," which appeared in the INQUIRER's Metro section, Mr. Regalado Ladisla mistakenly gave his ATM card number instead of his account number.

His correct Metrobank account number is 3-473-19501-2, opened at the bank's branch in Cubao.

Ladisla, a private security officer, sought the help of the INQUIRER in raising funds for his son, Jhunrie.

Jhunrie has been diagnosed as being afflicted with Ventricular Septal Defect or VSD.

VSD is a condition wherein the heart of a patient has a hole, which needs to be patched up in an operation.

The cost of the operation amounts to P69,228.

Donations can be sent through the account number above. Ladisla can also be reached at the Philippine Daily Inquirer at 897-8808 loc. 527.

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WATER CRISIS

MWSS blames Napocor

By Tina Santos
and Ronnel Domingo

THERE is a looming water crisis, and officials of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System have pinned the blame squarely on the National Power Corporation for diverting too much water to its hydroelectric plant.

In a letter to Napocor President Rogelio Murga, MWSS Administrator Orlando Hondrade said that the power agency aggravated the water crisis threatening Metro Manila—a crisis that was foreseen months before when meager rainfall was observed in the National Capital Region.

The Nov. 4, 2003 letter, a copy of which was obtained by the INQUIRER, revealed that the electric company's "over-release" of water to the National Irrigation Administration and the Angat Hydroelectric Plant resulted in the sudden drop of water resources in the Angat Dam.

Melburgo S. Chiu, Napocor vice president for hydro generation, confirmed that there had been "over-releases" of water in October and early November last year.

Chiu explained that in October, "the water level in Angat was above the upper rule curve," which indicates a comfortable water supply.

"So we are allowed to (release water from Angat)," Chiu said.

"In early November, we had to release more water because the 200-megawatt Angat hydropower plant was dispatched (ordered to run)," he added.

The official explained that a partial blackout took away 1,305 MW of generating capacity from the Luzon grid, and that the National Transmission Corp.'s systems operations tapped Angat Dam to provide the needed capacity to keep the Luzon grid stable.

"These over-releases are not enough to cause a shortage of water," Chiu clarified.

According to the National Water Resources Board, the water level at Angat dam has dropped to 201.56 meters—4.75 meters below the safe level.

The lack of rainfall in the past two months had also contributed its share to the looming crisis.

Angat Dam supplies the water needs of 10.8 million residents of Metro Manila and parts of Bulacan and Pampanga.

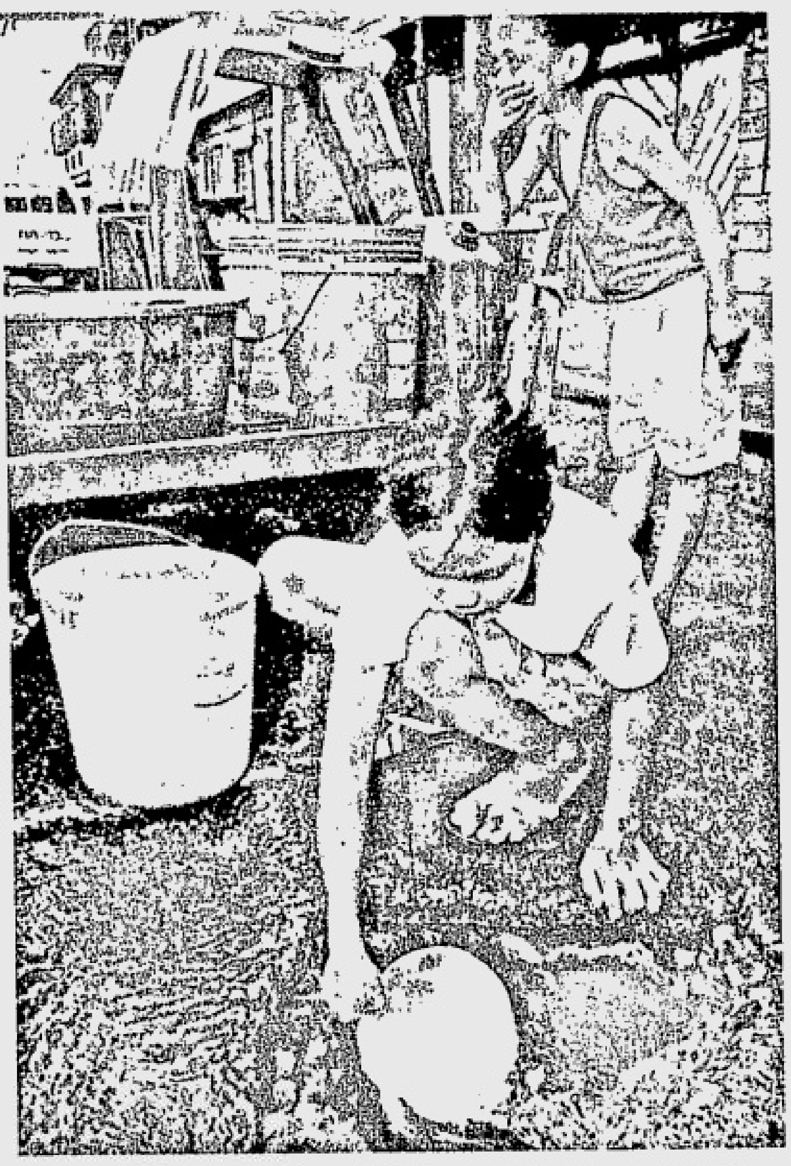
In his letter, Hondrade said that in October and November last year, the monthly average releases of water to the NIA is about double its allocation.

In October, NPC released about 31.25 cms. of water, when the NIA's irrigation daily requirement (IDR) was only 16.82 cms. The same thing happened in the period of Nov. 1 to 2, when the NPC released 18.31 cms., or more than twice its IDR of 6.79 cms.

Hondrade said that by next month, the Angat Dam's water level would not be enough to sustain the requirements of the MWSS and NIA.

This, he said, would result in severe water rationing in Metro Manila.

Some 80,000 households in the metropolis have already been affected by the December cutback in water supply. An estimated 1,250 hectares of farmland in Bulacan and Pampanga are also experiencing water shortage for irrigation.



CHILDREN draw water from a leaking pipe of the Maynilad Water Services Inc. along Herrera Street in Tondo, Manila. Residents appear unmoved by warnings of an impending water crisis in Metro Manila since many of them have been living with a water shortage for a long time already.

RANDY HORMILLOSA

Countdown on for 2 men on death row

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

IT IS now up to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Roberto Lara and Roderick Licayan, scheduled to the death chamber on Jan. 30, are hoping that Ms Macapagal would stay their execution, New Bilibid Prisons chaplain Fr. Robert Olaguer told the INQUIRER yesterday.

While some groups are pushing for the reopening of Lara and Licayan's case, Olaguer said Lara and Licayan are pinning their hopes on the President.

Yesterday, Lara just stayed on his bed until noon and refused to talk to anyone, Olaguer said.

Lara did not get up yesterday—"though he always used to, whenever I passed by his cell," Olaguer said.

Licayan just coldly answered Olaguer's questions. The stereo, which Olaguer hears every time he goes to the cell, was turned off.

The two should have been more optimistic now that there is a chance that their lives could be spared, the prison chaplain said.

Two men accused of the crime for which Lara and Licayan had been convicted were arrested recently.

Pedrito Mabansag and Noel delos Reyes told police that Lara had no part in the 1998 kidnapping of Joseph Tomas Co and Linda Manaysay.

But Olaguer said that when he asked the other inmates why Lara and Licayan felt depressed, one of them said that a lawyer on Monday afternoon dropped by their cell and told the death row convicts to stop hoping. The inmate quoted the lawyer as saying that the executions would proceed.

Olaguer said that he does not know who the lawyer was. He also said that the two men's reactions are normal—they are death convicts with just 16 days left to live should the executions push through.

Reminding them of their plight would just aggravate their fears and sorrow, Olaguer said.

But the chaplain said he was expecting Lara and Licayan to recover today, as their relatives would be visiting them this afternoon.

Help us, cops appeal to village residents

By Margaux Ortiz

THE PARAÑAQUE police chief yesterday appealed to security officers, building administrators and homeowners of villages and condominiums to watch out for suspicious residents who might be involved in the drug trade.

Supt. Ronald Estilles made the appeal following Monday's raid on the fifth shabu facility found in Parañaque City.

"It is not easy for the police to penetrate posh subdivisions and condominiums," Estilles said. "We really need the help of the people."

Estilles stressed that of the five shabu facilities raided in the city, "only one homeowner in Multinational Village blew the whistle on his drug trafficker neighbor."

"The others would cooperate with us, but only during the actual surveillance or raid," Estilles said. "Most of the security officers, building administrators and neighbors do not take the initiative to tell on their suspicious neighbors."

Estilles emphasized that building administrators should screen possible tenants before allowing them to rent a condominium unit or house, while security guards should always be on the lookout for possible "threats" in their areas.

"People should make this drug problem their own problem," Estilles stressed.

Quoting figures released by the Dangerous Drugs Board, Estilles said that there are 1.8 million regular shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride) users, and 1.6 million occasional users in the country.

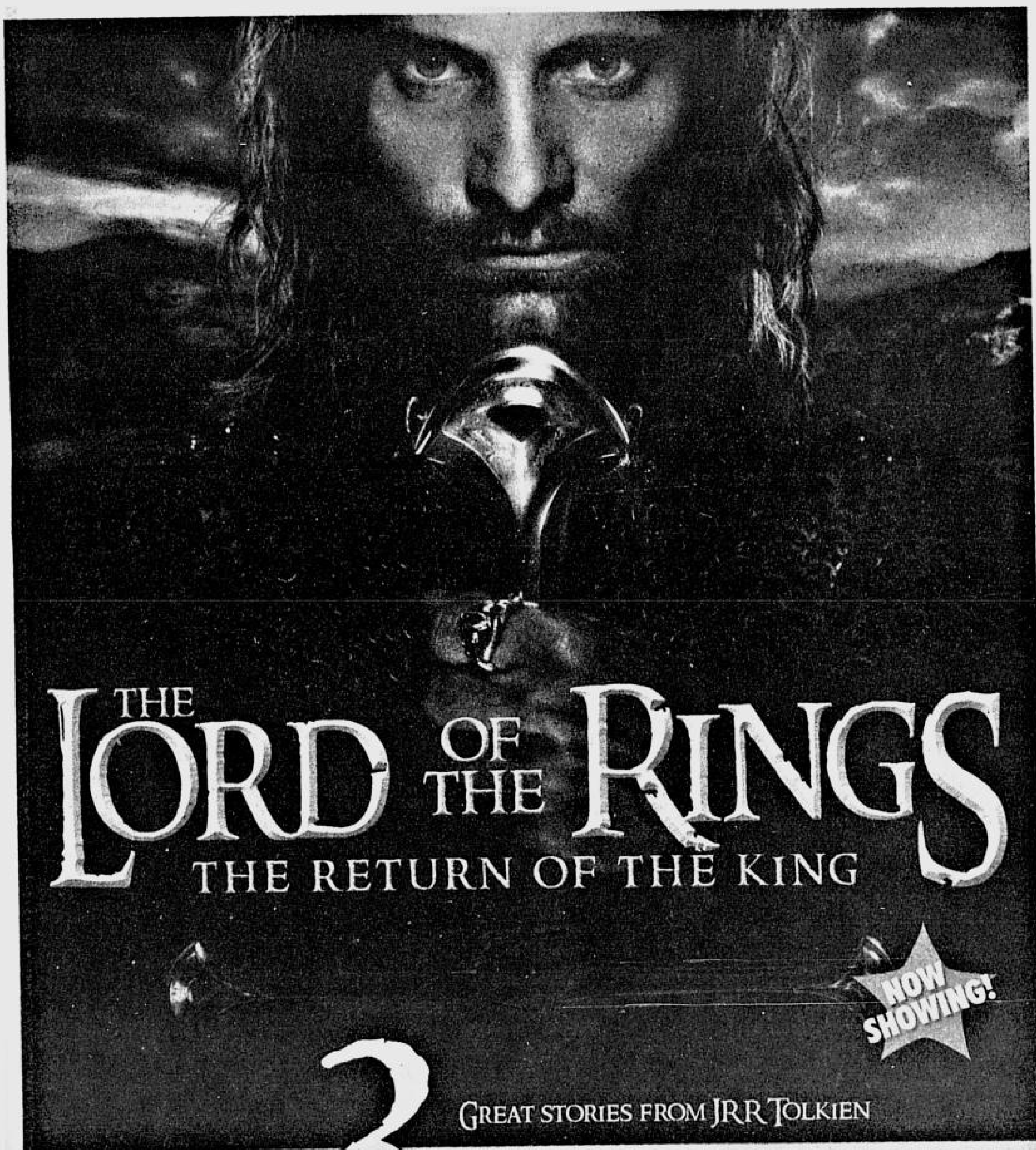
He added that the local shabu industry easily makes P400 billion a year. The prohibited drug's street value has also increased to P2,000 per gram.

"How many families have been victimized by drug-using robbers, holdup men and rapists?" Estilles asked.

Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force members on Monday raided a "research and development" facility for the manufacture of flavored shabu on Roxas Boulevard in Barangay Tambo, Parañaque.

The laboratory was one of three facilities that members of the task force raided in Parañaque and nearby Las Piñas City.

The 20 kilos of high-grade shabu and ingredients seized from the raids were said to be worth at least P34 billion.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BASKETBALL: NBA Greatest Games-St. Louis Spirits vs Kentucky Colonels (April 1, 1976); 9 a.m.; Solar Sports—Check out classic ABA action.

NBA-Blazers vs Clippers; 11:30 a.m. (r-8 p.m.); Solar Sports—LA coach Mike Dunleavy faces his old squad Portland in this western encounter.

Schedules subject to change without prior notice.

SPORTS

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Tañamor, Payla post easy wins

Brin stuns Thai opponent in Olympic boxing elims

By Roy Luarca

BRIN rocks Boonjumnong with a left straight in the 22nd Asian Boxing Championship in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. Brin won. ROMY HOMILLADA

PUERTO PRINCESA City, Palawan—Harry Tañamor and Violito Payla turned their opponents into punching bags Tuesday night en route to abbreviated victories that boosted the Philippines' bid in the 22nd Asian Boxing Championships at the Puerto Princesa Coliseum here.

Unleashing rapid left-right combinations, Tañamor won over Kuwait's Faizal Altanak by RSC-OS (Referee-Stopped-Contest-Outscored) 52 seconds into the second round while Payla, landing strong body blows, scored three standing eight counts and trounced Laos' Nhothin Holapa Tipone by RSC-CCL (Referee-Stopped-Contest-Compulsary Count Limit) with 1 minute and 26 seconds gone in the second round.

"*Noong makita ko ang porma n'ya* (Altanak), *alam kong di ko na siya patatapusin* (When I saw him, I knew he won't last long)," said the 25-year-old Tañamor, light flyweight gold medalist in both the 1st Afro-Asian Games in Hyderabad, India, and the Vietnam Southeast Asian Games.

Payla also found Tipone an easy target after noticing the weak stomach of his rival.

"*Di ko na pinaporma* (I was in complete control)," said the 24-year-old Payla, a flyweight discovery from Cagayan de Oro City.

Tañamor, however, is up against a tough opponent, world champion Zou Shiming of China, in the quarterfinals.

Shiming, who edged Tañamor in last year's Bangkok world championships, subdued Toshiyuki Igakahashi of Japan.

Bantamweight Arlan Lerio dropped a close 20-19 decision to Kazakhstan's Assanov Almuz and followed light heavyweight Maraon Goles to the sidelines.

Lightweight Florencio Ferrer was fighting Indonesia's Yoshia Pujiono at presstime. Also seeing action are welterweight Francis Joven and middleweight Christopher Camat.

In late Monday night action, Romeo Brin came out of retirement to shock Thailand's Manus Boomjumnong in the light welterweight division.

The 30-year-old Brin, a last-minute replacement for the ailing Mark Jason Melligen, was on the defensive in the first round but counterpunched effectively in the next three to remain on track of a third Olympic stint. He saw action in the 1996 Atlanta and 2000 Sydney Olympics.

The Taytay-born Brin, who's now living here with pregrant wife Ofelia, an elementary teacher, and 7-year-old son Junior, was told he would be subbing for the feverish Melligen only Thursday afternoon.

Brin, a staff sergeant of the Philippine Army, has kept himself in shape as boxing coach here.

A gold medalist in the 1991 Brunei Southeast Asian Games, Brin is slated to meet Kazakhstan's Kazymzhanov Nurza in the quarterfinals.

Goles bowed to Uzbekistan's Galanov Nodir, 16-5.

RP Ladies Open on; Villaroman player to beat

By Jong Arcano

VILLAROMAN: Ready to shine

A DECADE ago when she was among the world's top jungolfers and even owned the Philippine Ladies Open title, Carmelette Villaroman had scholarship offers from top schools in the United States and even the option of a crack at the LPGA.

But motherhood got in the way and Villaroman became just another of those what-could-have-been stories.

At 27, Villaroman seems to have gotten a second wind and has the "winning itch" that makes her the player to beat in the 42nd edition of the Ladies Open blasting off today at the Manila Golf Club course.

While reclaiming the title she won in 1993 is the primary goal, Villaroman is out to prove that she's back for good and enjoying the game again when she rejoins the Open after a three-year absence.

"I'm back and I feel that I'm ready to challenge for the title," Villaroman told the INQUIRER. "I've reached about 75 percent of my skill level and I believe that I've prepared well enough for the Open."

That is certainly bad news to the field of 67 and 21 foreign entries from six countries who are entered in the 54-hole tourney organized by the Women's Golf Association of the Philippines headed by Gina Tuason.

If she lives up to expectations, potential challengers like Lora Roberto, Lina de Guzman and Lucy Landicho and junior aces like Jayvie Agojo, Remijin Camping, Katrina Gonzales and Geleen Handog would need more than hard work to stop Villaroman.

Meanwhile, the lady who took over when Villaroman disappeared from the golf radar—Jenny Rosales—led yesterday's hitting of the ceremonial drive.

Rosales, who racked up an unprecedented five straight crowns from 1994 before she turned pro, was joined by National Golf Association of the Philippines president Rod Feliciano, Chito Recto of the host club and Tuason.

Representatives of tournament sponsors Pagcor, PCSO, the First Gentleman Foundation, Golden Donuts, Rep. Gilberto Duavit, Equitable-PCI Bank, Inquirer Golf Monthly, ICTSI, Slazenger, Nike Park and Crucible Gallery also graced the affair.

The entry list includes bets from Manila Golf, Southwoods, Canlubang, Sta. Elena, Navy, Wack Wack, Riviera, Forest Hills, Aguinaldo, Villamor, Del Monte, Alabang, Mimosa, Mt. Malarayat and The Country Club.

No NCFP part in planned Torre-Paragua showdown

TORRE: Saddened

GRANDMASTER Eugene Torre yesterday defended his planned showdown with International Master Mark Paragua, saying the duel is aimed at boosting chess in the country.

"We are doing this for chess and not for any personal reward," said the 52-year-old Torre, Asia's first GM, in a telephone interview with the INQUIRER.

The longtime vanguard of local chess said he was saddened by the reported resignation of fellow GMs Joey Antonio and Bong Villamayor as officers of the National Chess Federation of the Philippines (NCFP).

Antonio and Villamayor stepped down on Monday, saying they objected to the NCFP's priorities in promoting the P1.5 million Torre-Paragua match.

"I don't think it (resignation) is necessary. My showdown with Mark is a private undertaking and not the NCFP's," Torre said.

Federation secretary general Sammy Estimo said Antonio and Villamayor should put their

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Go wants more talents to boost nat'l pool

GO: Eyeing 2005

STILL ruing the Filipino tracksters' failure to maximize their gold-medal haul in the last Southeast Asian Games in Vietnam, the national athletics chief yesterday announced plans to beef up the training pool with more talents.

Go Teng Kok, president of the Philippine Track and Field Association (Patafa), said he wants the number of athletes vying for berths in the 2005 Manila SEAG team raised to 78 from 52 to maximize the country's bid for medals.

Of the 52 members in the training pool, only 35 vied in Vietnam, where the tracksters wound up with eight gold medals.

Although athletics lived up to its reputation as the most productive in terms of golds won, the harvest fell short of the 12 that Go had expected from his wards.

In a four-hour meeting with the coaching staff and Patafa secretary general Benjamin Silva-Netto yesterday, Go instructed them to tap more athletes from the schools, the armed forces and other squads for training.

"We need to have at least three athletes competing in any single event. Since we will focus only on 26 of the 46 events, the increase is minimal and will require minimal financial support from the Philippine Sports Commission," Go explained.

He noted instances in the SEAG where the Vietnamese and the Thais fielded as many as five athletes in some events. "I told the coaches to add athletes in events where the gold is in the bag and in others where we have a medal chance," Go said.

The mentors who met with Go were head coach Isidro del Prado, Joseph Sy, Dario de Rosas, Romeo Gido, Jojo Posadas, Agustin Jarina and Luisito Artiaga.

"We barely missed the gold in the men's 4x400 relay. We will now strengthen our relay teams, including the women's 4x100," Go added.

The coaches told Go that some schools are reluctant to release their student-athletes to Patafa for training and urged him to write the schools' administrators.

Go added he would soon meet with acting PSC executive director Edgardo Mateo to thresh out the funding requirements of the national pool.

The Philippines bagged the SEAG golds in the women's long jump (Lerma Bulauitan Gabito) and in the men's 10,000 meters (Eduardo Buenavista), hammer throw (Arnel Fereira), 3,000-m steeplechase (Rene Herrera), 1,500m (John Lozada), 400m (Ernie Candelario), marathon (Allan Ballester) and javelin (Danilo Fresnido).

Tangkay fires 40 as Welcoat foils Blu Star

By Marc Anthony Reyes

JERCULES Tangkay unloaded 37 of his career-high 40 points in the second half to lift Welcoat Paints past Blu Star Detergent, 90-84, yesterday at the start of the PBL Platinum Cup semifinals at the Pasig Sports Center.

Tangkay, who played for Sta. Lucia Realty and Mobiline in the PBA, caught fire after scoring only three points in the first half, where the Paint Masters trailed by as many as 25 points at 36-11 early in the second quarter.

The 6-foot-1 guard unloaded 20 points in the third quarter as Welcoat moved within 61-68 and then added 17 more in the final period as he joined hands with pro-bound James Yap to secure the Paint Masters' 10th win in 13 games.

The Detergent Kings, who limited the Paint Masters to just nine points in the first quarter, just couldn't stop Tangkay and went down to their sixth loss in 13 games.

"He was unbelievable," said Welcoat coach Leo Austria of Tangkay, who also hauled down four rebounds and stole twice in 28 minutes of action.

STANDINGS	W	L
Welcoat	10	3
Sunkist	8	5
Fash	8	5
Blu Star	7	6

GAMES TOMORROW
(Pasig Sports Center)
1:30 p.m.—Fash vs Blu Star
3:30 p.m.—Welcoat vs Sunkist

Fash Liquid, with its starters finishing in double figures, downed Sunkist-UST, 82-72, in the second game.

The Liquid Power posted their third straight victory in earning their eighth win in 13 games to tie their victims for second place.

Tangkay's 37 points in the final half shattered the previous best of 28 posted by former Welcoat hotshot RenRen Ritualo on Jan. 26, 2002. His 20 points in the third also matched Ritualo's record for most points in a quarter he set also on the same day.

Scores:

First Game

WELCOAT 90—Tangkay 40, Yap 15, Wilson 8, Sotto 6, Artadi 6, Santos 5, Omolon 5, Kalaw 3, Reyes 2, Capus 0, Cuan 0.

BLU STAR 84—Dela Cuesta 21, Pascual 14, Gamboa 12, Canaleta 11, Junio 10, Gatumbato 6, Prior 4, David 2, Almeda 2, Lopez 2, Mesina 0, Victoria 0.

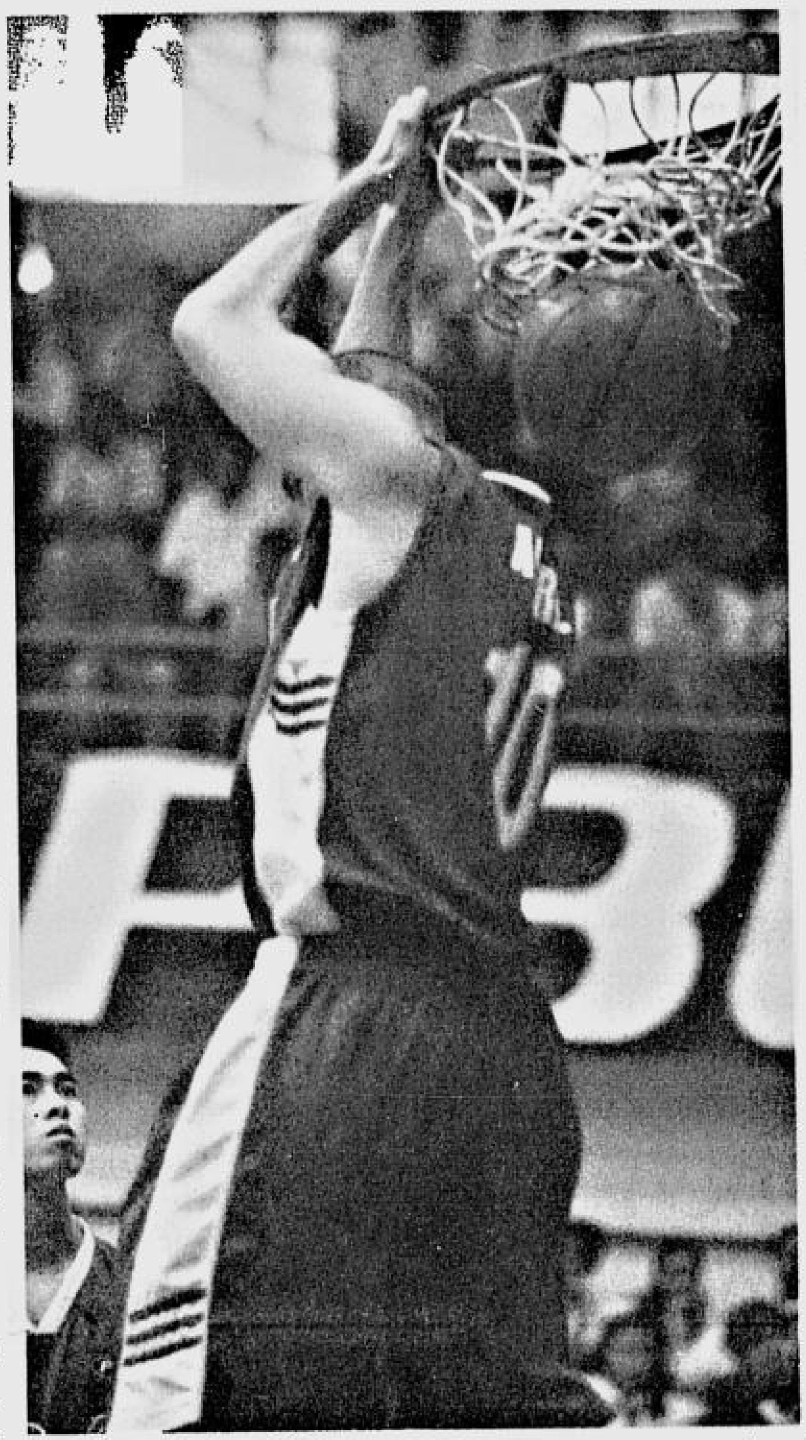
Quarters: 9-25, 31-43, 61-68, 90-84.

Second Game

FASH 82—Simon 18, Fonacier 17, Salangsang 14, Gelig 11, Alvarez 8, Dualan 5, Gonzales 5, Tan 4, Dy 0, Mercado 0.

SUNKIST-UST 72—Villamin18, Oreta 10, Franco 9, Espiritu 8, Compton 7, Santos 5, Mendoza 4, Luanzon 4, Vizcarra 3, Manansala 2, De Guzman 2.

Quarters: 30-13, 50-29, 62-49, 82-72.


POWER forward Rich Alvarez of Fash Liquid scores on a reverse slam unmolested during the game against Sunkist-UST. RUDY ESPERAS

Indonesians confirm NBC Sinulog Cup stint

INDONESIAN Basketball League (IBL) club Mitra-Jakarta has confirmed its participation in the 2004 Panasonic-National Basketball Conference (NBC) Sinulog Cup set Jan. 24-29 in Cebu City.

Mitra team owner and chief delegate Roy Widjaja relayed the good news to NBC secretary general Tito Palma in a recent overseas call.

"We are happy that Mitra has accepted our invitation," said Palma. "This continues the ties between our leagues and our countries."

Last year, NBC club Spring Cooking Oil-San Pablo played an exhibition match with the Indonesian national team during the IBL opening.

Mitra, known as Kalila in the 2003 IBL season, is coached by Hendrawan Kaluku and assisted by Rachmat Hidayat. Danny Dungus is the team manager.

Mitra's key players are 6-foot-6 center Ponco Ariwibono, Dian Heriyadi and I Gusti Nugrah.

The Sinulog Cup is supported by Panasonic, Sulpicio Lines, BJ Star Logistics, Nature's Spring Drinking Water and Molten Basketballs.

Palma has set a meeting of team managers at 3 p.m. tomorrow at the NBC office (Room 712, Makati Cinema Square Tower).

No NCFP part in chess duel

From page A25

resignations "in writing so we can notify the proper sports authorities accordingly."

But the two claimed they have already filed their resignation letter to the federation's president, Mat Defensor.

The GMs also stressed that Estimo failed to address their complaint regarding the lack of a sound developmental and training programs despite the availability of funds from the Philippine Sports Commission.

"Where did the PSC funds go?" asked Antonio, who beat Torre in another one-on-one showdown several years ago.

Paragua, on the other hand, said he is not keen on facing Antonio, who is ranked next to him as the country's best woodpusher, in a similar one-on-one match.

"*Wala na po akong dapat patunayan laban kay* Antonio (I don't have anything to prove against Antonio)," said Paragua, who beat Antonio in their last four meetings, including their sudden-death match in the Asian Zonal and their semifinal playoff in the Vietnam SEA Games rapid individual event.

Paragua won the SEAG rapid gold medal and, along with Asian Zonal champion Ronald Dableo, qualified to the world championships.

On Antonio's claim that Paragua is not the country's No. 1 player, the 19-year-old former youth prodigy has this to say:

"*Hindi naman gini*-gauge *ang pagiging* No. 1 *sa* title *kundi sa* performance (Being No. 1 is measured by performance, not the title you have achieved)."

Estimo also said the NCFP has no participation in the planning of the Torre-Paragua duel.

"The project is being organized by Gemini Talents Corporation ... and the company is still looking for prospective corporate sponsors," he said. *Marc Anthony Reyes, Marlon Bernardino*

SPORTSWATCH

CSA tossers in big start

DEFENDING elementary champion Colegio San Agustin got off to a rousing start in the 9th Milo Best Women's Volleyball League (WVL) last Sunday by posting two victories at the St. Benedict College courts. The CSA girls ripped Colegio de Sta. Rosa, 25-6, 25-11, and then won by default over host St. Benedict College. Reigning high school titlist San Antonio de Padua College trimmed Assumption Antipolo, 25-15, 25-20, to share the early Group A lead with Colegio de Sta. Rosa, School of St. Anthony and St. James Academy in the two-level competition organized by Best Center and sponsored by Milo. St. Anthony ripped Our Lord's Grace Montessori, 25-5, 25-9; St. James routed Assumption Antipolo, 25-6, 25-4; and Sta. Rosa walked over Philippine Science High. **The other results: Elementary**—Miriam College d. Poveda LC, 13-25, 25-23, 15-10; Dominican School d. Diliman Prep. School, 25-20, 15-25, 15-11; Holy Trinity Academy d. Colegio de Sta. Rosa, 25-17, 25-14; JASMS d. Southville, 25-14, 25-18. **High School**—St. Theresa's d. Poveda LC, 24-25, 25-17, 15-11; Antipolo Lady of Lourdes School d. St. Paul's College (QC), 25-9, 25-8; La Salle Antipolo d. Antipolo Lady of Lourdes School, 25-18, 25-22; Diliman Prep. School d. La Salle Antipolo, 18-25, 25-20, 15-10; Holy Trinity Academy d. Paref-Rosehill, 25-22, 23-25, 15-12; JASMS d. Paref-Woodrose, 25-21, 21-25, 15-0; St. Scholastica's d. St. Mary's by default; and Holy Family School d. UPIS, 25-21, 25-14.

Milo Checkmate listing on

ENROLLEES in the Milo Checkmate clinic in Metro Manila have until Saturday to register at the following venues: Jollibee-Greenhills Shopping Center (GSC), Chowking-Sucat Road in Parañaque, Rizal Memorial Sports Complex, Manila, and at the mini-arcade of J&F Divino Bldg. at 967 Aurora Blvd. (near LRT 2 Anonas Station), in Quezon City. Clinic schedules are as follows: GSC—1:30-5 p.m.; Parañaque—7:30-11:30 p.m.; RMSC—8 a.m.-12 noon at the second floor of Badminton Bldg., and Quezon City—9 a.m.-1 p.m. Deadline for provincial classes in Plaridel, Bulacan, and Dagupan City will be on Sunday. The clinic in Plaridel will be held at the second floor of Walter Mart, while classes in Dagupan will be held at the third floor court lobby of Nepo Mall. For inquiries, call 826-8560 or 0916-8521096.

Benedict cagerettes win

ST. BENEDICT College downed AMA, 63-55, at the start of the NCRAA women's basketball quarterfinals at the RTU gym. In other games, Lyceum routed PUP, 78-48; La Salle-Manila beat PMI, 55-52, and RTU edged La Salle-Dasmariñas, 56-53.

70 cockers vying in Pasay

AT LEAST 70 entries are vying in Pasay City Cockpit's 4-cock derby on Friday, according to promoters Kags Paliza and Aba Badiola. For an entry fee of P6,600, the guaranteed prize is P500,000, regardless of the number of entries. Paliza and Badiola said the prizes are guaranteed. Submission of weights is set for tomorrow from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. For inquiries, call 843-1898, 843-1746 and 816-6750. The event will start at 10 a.m. Friday. PCC Association stalwart Bobby Cabillon of Laguna said the latest batch of confirmed entries include Nono San Pablo, Dong Palileo, Evely Caparros, Danny Sarmiento, Frankie Tan, Tony Leyba, Manny Dayrit, Alma Pineda, Arnel Geronga. Derby sponsors are Sagupaan Hammer, Sagupaan B-50 Forten and Sagupaan Mite Free.

Las Piñas derby today

FORTY-EIGHT fights spice up another exciting 3-cock derby at the air-conditioned Las Piñas Cockpit beginning at 7 p.m. today. For an entry fee of P6,600, the cash prize at stake is P300,000, plus three refrigerators for the champions. Derby hosts Mayor Nene Aguilar and LPC general manager Alex Tobias said entries must be submitted today, from 7 a.m. to 12 noon. For inquiries, call 873-1040. Meanwhile, another 3-cock derby sizzles at the arena on Jan. 21, with host Yoyoy Mananari, followed by the 4-cock derby of host Gerry Ramos on Jan. 28. Three entries emerged as champions in the Grand Opening 4-Cock Derby last week. These were BRPET (Boy Royo and Pol Estrellado), RT 114B (Ruel Ricafort) and Gezel entry.

Palawan takes the gold; RP team is next?

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

PUERTO Princesa, Palawan—The first knockout, wow, was scored minutes before the tournament was officially declared open on Monday.

It now goes down as the biggest surprise of the 22nd Asian Boxing Championships here.

The whole stadium, stunned, was left dumbfounded.

The knockout artist did it wearing a resplendent, new *barong tagalog*, no boxing gloves.

He scored with a single stinging blow to the chin, using the mike. Blamm!

Leave' it to the magic and menace of words.

All he did was hail the visiting president of the AIBA (International Amateur Boxing Association) using the most unexpected adjective.

The word? INCORRUPTIBLE.

Yes, it came as a total shock.

Take it from one who saw and heard it all.

I shook my head and took efforts to steady myself.

I had to hold on to the steel railing separating the ringside section from the stadium floor.

I felt giddy, my face flushed with deep wonderment.

***

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce to you our honorable guest, the irrepressible, incorruptible Prof. Anwar Chowdry, president of Assosacion Internationale de Boxe."

The booming introduction was made by Manny Lopez, president of the Amateur Boxing Association of the Philippines and Aiba sec-gen for Asia.

You can bet Prof. Chowdry, a hulking figure known practically to all Filipinos who had followed RP boxing misfortunes in the Olympics, will never forget the date: Jan. 12, 2004, opening of the 22nd Asian Boxing Championships at the sprawling P200-million Puerto Princesa Coliseum.

Who knows? Maybe it was the first time the grizzled, hulking Aiba chief had been introduced in such a magical, magnanimous manner.

Maybe it could not happen to him even in his own country or hometown in Pakistan.

We trust organizers would gift Prof. Chowdry with a video of the earth-shaking opening rites in this progressive, quiet, neat capital.

***

For the information of Prof. Chowdry, his name was on the lips of many Filipino boxing fans after the final night of the Vietnam Southeast Asian Games boxing program in Ho Chi Minh City last month.

As the most powerful man behind the conduct of matches and assignment of judges and referees in the said event, these local fans felt Prof. Chowdry could've done something to save RP fighters from crooked scoring in the Vietnam meet.

For a fact, there was a near riot inside the stadium during that championship.

Six Filipino fighters competed in the final program but only one, Harry Tañamor, who did not have to go up against a Thai in the finals, salvaged a gold.

It was also reported that, during the Vietnam Games boxing finals, a Thai general was securely seated beside Prof. Chowdry.

We may never know how the scoring was done. But those who had viewed the fights objectively would swear that the Filipinos were cheated out of at least two boxing golds, excluding the one that could have been bagged by Chris Camat, who also got a raw deal after manhandling a Thai in the semifinals.

***

Now, going to Manny Lopez, he did not say this, but it was obvious he was actually expressing a deep wish when he made that startling introduction.

It's a fact that Lopez and his staff had done everything within their capacity to upgrade the state of amateur boxing in the Philippines.

He has firms and authorities to back him up in his dream of an Olympic boxing gold medal, like Mayor Edward Hagedorn of this city and Gov. Joel Reyes of Palawan, the hosts of the current championship.

As usual, Manny Lopez is again staking all his cards in a gold bid in this year's Athens Olympics.

But there was an odder, if not more stunning, twist on opening day. It involved two-time Olympian Romeo Brin.

Look, Brin, retired after the Busan Asiad last year, suddenly lined himself up for a third straight Olympic appearance after outpunching Thailand's Manus Boonjumnong, light welterweight gold medal winner in the Vietnam Games.

***

Brin, an army sergeant from Taytay now based here, was called back from retirement and squeezed into the RP lineup after Joegen Milligen, the original entry, landed in the hospital due to recurring fever.

Brin said he had stopped putting on the gloves after Busan but did not think twice when he was recalled last Thursday.

He had three days to cram. At least, he said, he managed to keep trim, within the 64-kilogram limit, by regularly playing basketball.

Brin had a tense slow start and fell by two points after the first round.

The next round was a total turnaround as Brin, egged on by the big, festive crowd, roared and raged like a bull to stun and dominate his Thai foe.

Finishing mightily, Brin was the biggest toast for local fans on the first night of the weeklong amateur boxing fiesta that has lured nearly 30 countries.

Now, a look at the RP boxing team here.

The fact that they had to recall a retiree clearly showed we don't have that deep a bench for the Olympic gold quest.

Of course, it may not be as hopeless again as when Onyok Velasco, ganged upon by the so-called European Bloc in the Aiba during the Atlanta boxing finals, ended up in tears.

Yes, this province takes the gold for the splendid hosting of the Olympic boxing qualification round.

But maybe the magic word, scored like a knockout by Manny Lopez on opening night, could ultimately have its weight in Olympic gold?

Does Ate Glo care for sports?

CLEAN LIVING

Manolo R. Iñigo

MANY people are asking why President Macapagal-Arroyo did not attend last Friday's annual PSA Awards Night honoring the country's sports achievers in 2003 at the Manila Pavilion.

Frankly, I'm at a loss myself because up to now I have not heard of any official statement, from either Malacañang or the PSA, as to why Ms Macapagal, who was supposed to be the special guest of the evening, failed to grace this once-a-year affair held under the auspices of the Philippine Sportswriters Association. Was she sick that night and not feeling well after attending—earlier in the day—the Black Nazarene procession in Quiapo? What made her skip (for the second time in a row) the PSA Awards Night?

That presidential "snub"—like it or not—raises much concern among sports followers, who keep on saying that the no-show could very well be a sad reflection of the way our leaders treat Filipino sports heroes. It showed that sports is regarded as a poor relation and treated as one, compared with other departments and agencies which hold important roles in government and thus receive immediate attention and special care. Obviously, sports is not a priority and does not enjoy government respect and appreciation.

In every country of the world, whatever its political persuasion, the government is responsible for the welfare of its people, including the well-being of its past sports achievers. And one way for these leaders to show that they care for sports is by spending at least a little quality time with the athletes despite their hectic schedule.

Just because these athletes and sports officials had been earlier honored by the First Couple at Malacañang does not mean that the President and First Gentleman Mike Arroyo should no longer attend the PSA Awards Night. Their presence in this "Oscar Night of Philippine Sports" is something that has been eagerly awaited by the athletes and the other members of the sporting community because it inspires them to achieve some more.

***

MIGHTY MIKA. Cool and thoroughly confident, Mika "The Iceman" Immonen of Finland added another feather to his cap by winning the 2nd Annual US Professional Pool Players Association (UPPA) Pro Tour Championships Monday (Manila time) at the Bicycle Casino in Bell Gardens, Los Angeles, California.

Playing with full concentration, the 31-year-old Immonen won the season-opening 9-ball tournament undefeated, making mincemeat of Charlie "Korean Dragon" Williams, 13-2, in the final and earning a fat paycheck of $10,000.

Last year in Manila, Immonen scored back-to-back victories in the highly successful On Cue 1 and 2 Series organized by Puyat Sports, headed by popular sports patrons Popit and Putch Puyat, and television giant ABS-CBN.

A pool player of 14 years, Immonen made his presence felt in 2001 when he won the World Pool 9-Ball Championship in Cardiff, Wales, beating 1996 champion Ralf "The Kaiser" Souquet of Germany, 17-10, in the final. Much earlier, he also won the European Straight Pool tournament in 1998, landed third in the 1998 US Open, won the European Tour in 1992, the Scandinavian Open in 1994-95 and the Peace Cup in Taiwan in 1996.

Immonen is not flashy at the pool table, but he is always full of concentration. Yet away from it, Immonen has the common touch. He keeps in good shape by jogging and rollerblading; he loves watching TV (his favorites are "Friends" and "The Simpsons") and going to the movies (his favorite stars are Paul Newman and Jennifer Lopez).

***

JUST ASKING. How come Efren "Bata" Reyes, who was installed in the Billiards Congress of America (BCA) Hall of Fame in Las Vegas last year, Francisco "Django" Bustamante, who emerged the world's top billiards money winner in 2003; and Canada-based sensation Alex Pagulayan, who made a strong impact on the international scene, were not cited by the Philippine Sportswriters Association during its recent PSA Awards Night? While they did not hog the spotlight in tournaments held here and, in the case of Reyes and Bustamante, failed to make good in the just ended SEA Games in Vietnam, it is on record that they accomplished so much in several tournaments staged last year.

Clemens to Astros

HOUSTON—Roger Clemens throws quite a curveball, too. Clemens changed course Monday, ending his much-balleyhooed retirement after only 78 days and agreeing to pitch with close friend Andy Pettitte on their hometown Houston Astros.

At 41, the six-time Cy Young winner got a one-year deal for $5 million. Instead of finishing in Yankee pinstripes, the Rocket splashed down in Spacetown. *AP*

NBA ROUNDUP

Lakers buck Kobe injury

LOS ANGELES—Devean George claimed 12 points and 12 rebounds to help the Los Angeles Lakers overcome the loss of Kobe Bryant to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers, 89-79, Monday.

Gary Payton and Brian Cook both had 13 points for the Lakers, who were already missing Shaquille O'Neal and Karl Malone and then lost Bryant with an injury in the first half.

But the bench players did well as six Los Angeles performers scored in double-figures, including Stanislav Medvedenko, who had 11 points and eight rebounds.

Bryant sprained his right shoulder in the first half, the same shoulder he had surgery on during the off-season. He is due to undergo an MRI exam Tuesday.

The Lakers guard was injured with 5.7 seconds left in the first quarter when Cleveland's Kedrick Brown landed on his shoulder after attempting a shot.

Bryant went to the clubhouse for X-rays, which were negative, before returning in the second quarter. He did not come out of the dressing room after halftime, however.

He finished with 10 points, five rebounds and two assists as the Lakers (23-11) won their second straight after a season-high, four-game losing streak.

LeBron James' first visit to the Lakers' home court was overshadowed by the injury to Bryant but he recorded 16 points, seven assists and five rebounds.

Zydrunas Ilgauskas led Cleveland with 19 points while Carlos Boozer added 12 points and 12 rebounds.

The Cavaliers dropped to 11-26, including an NBA-worst 2-18 on the road, while losing for the seventh time in nine games.

In other NBA action, Mike Miller scored 24 points to lead the Memphis Grizzlies past the Golden State Warriors, 115-113, in double overtime.

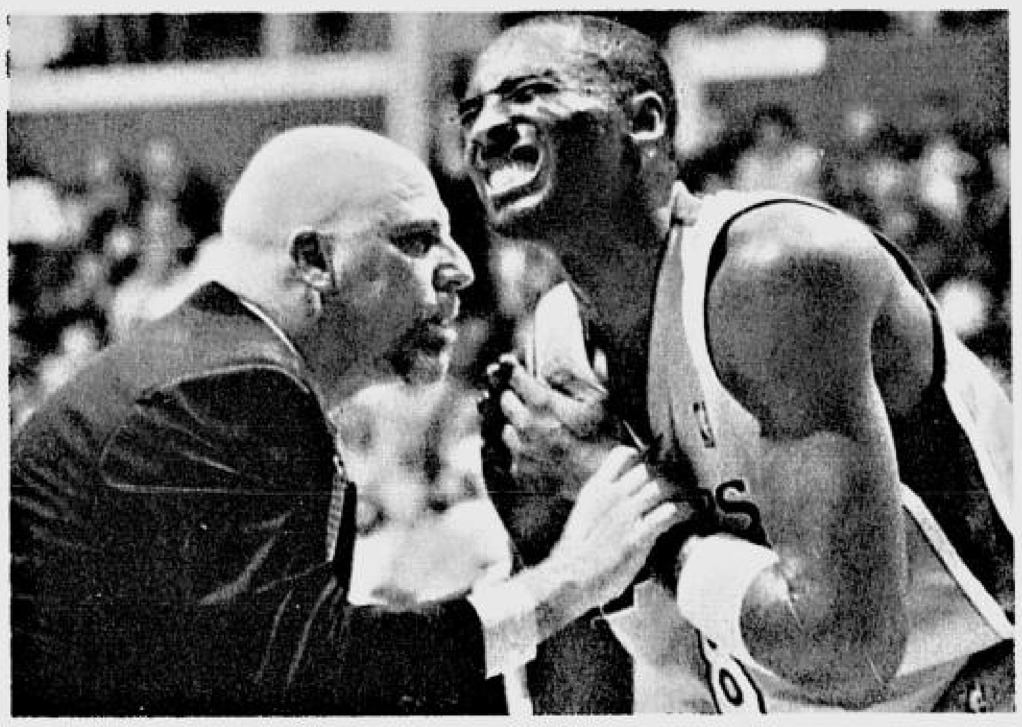
In Orlando, Allen Iverson contributed 26 points to end a long scoring slump as the Philadelphia 76ers edged the Magic, 87-82.

It was the first time since he was injured 14 games ago that Iverson had picked up more than 20 points. Glenn Robinson added 19 points for the Sixers while Samuel Dalembert had 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Tracy McGrady notched 32 points and 10 rebounds for Orlando.

In New York, Dirk Nowitzki amassed 31 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a wild 127-121 win over the Knicks in overtime. *Reuters*

Complete results: Dallas 127, New York 121 (OT); Philadelphia 87, Orlando 82; LA Lakers 89, Cleveland 79; Memphis 115, Golden State 113 (2OT).



BRYANT grimaces in pain as trainer Gary Vitti examines his injured shoulder. AFP

Agassi backs fight vs drugs

MELBOURNE, Australia—Andre Agassi says tennis is a leader in the fight against drugs in sport and Greg Rusedski's pending and public drug case hasn't tarnished its image.

"One of the things we can say is our sport is leading—if not the top sport—in drug testing in both intensity as far as what they test for and how often they test," Agassi told a news conference Tuesday.

Agassi, an eight-time Grand Slam champion, will begin the defense of his Australian Open title next week in Melbourne.

The season-opening major has been overshadowed by Rusedski's admission last week that he tested positive at Indianapolis last July for the steroid nandrolone. Rusedski faces a hearing in Montreal next month.

Meanwhile, two-time Australian Open champion Jennifer Capriati withdrew from the meet Tuesday because of a back injury.

Women's world No. 2 Kim Clijsters also withdrew from the adidas International in Sydney and said she's in doubt for the Australian Open, which starts Monday.

In Sydney, Australian wild card entry Chris Guccione upset top-seeded Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero in a 6-3, 7-6 (6) first-round shocker Tuesday at the adidas International. *AP*

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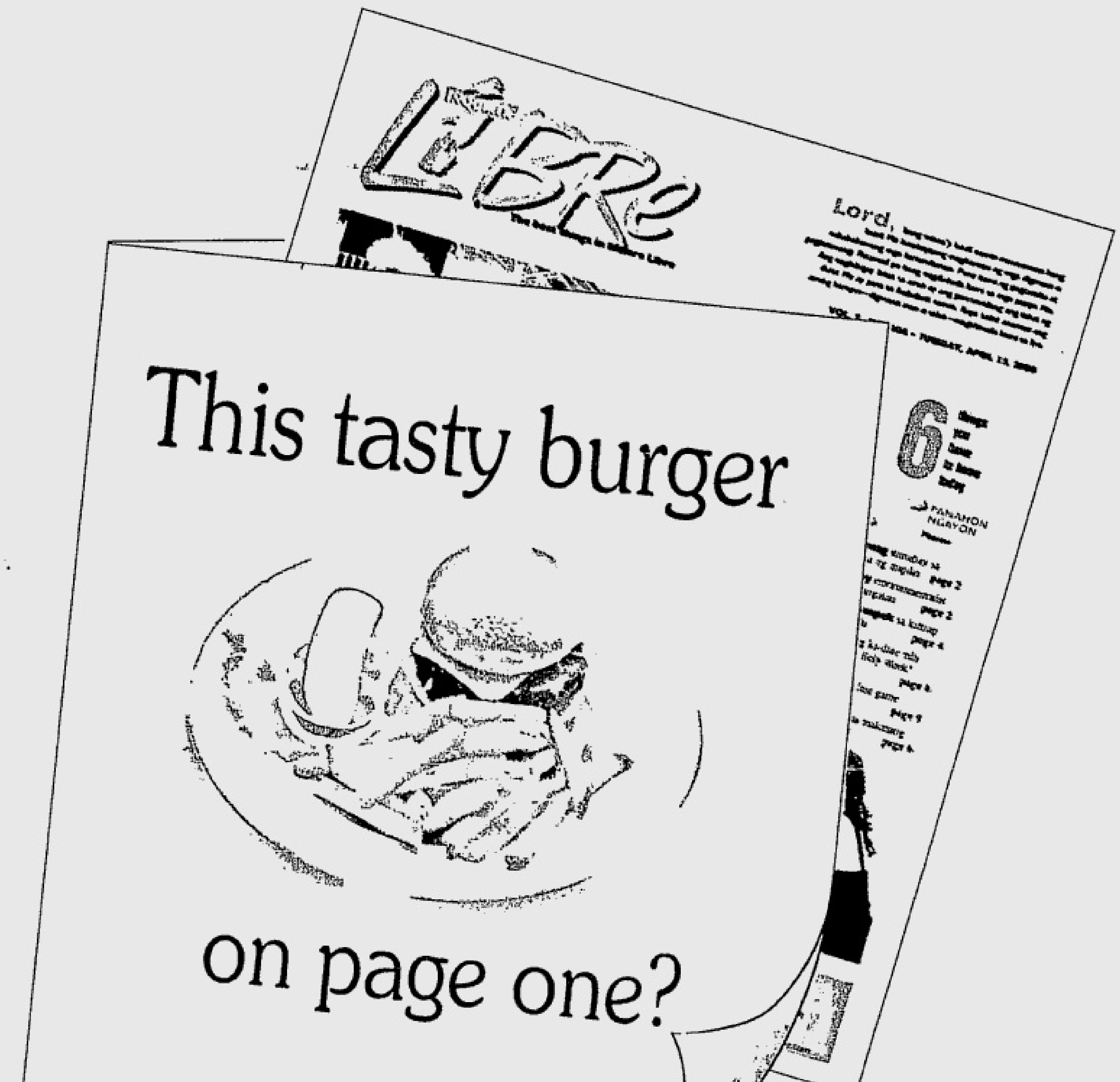

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Roses floated in the bathtub, the bouquet split in two

By Janet and Ruben Nepales
LA Correspondents

LOS ANGELES—The title of the first fast dance number played at the wedding reception of Lea Salonga and Robert Chien last Saturday summed up the evening's fun, intimate ambiance: "We Are Family."

The bride and groom, with the help of best friends, created a warm, cozy feel in the ornate Gold Room of the Millennium Biltmore Hotel and, earlier in the afternoon, during the wedding Mass at the vast, majestic Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

That Lea and Robert had only four principal sponsors, instead of following the tacky show biz practice of having a million and one *ninongs* and *ninangs*, said a lot about the couple's intention to have a truly meaningful day among only their closest relatives, friends and colleagues (final guest count was kept to about 266).

At the cathedral, the atmosphere was relaxed as there was no seating arrangement even for most members of the wedding entourage. Guests, who included Rudy and Myrna Tee and Ciso Chan of BMG Records, Lea's record label which just released her "100%" compilation CD, sat wherever they chose.

Only the presence of a media crew taping the ceremony, tight security, and the glorious surprise of the bride singing a wonderful song before reciting her wedding vows reminded everyone that this was a celebrity wedding.

What's for dinner

At the reception, by the time the second dance track, Abba's "Dancing Queen," blared in the softly lit Gold Room,' the white dance floor was packed with the couple's loved ones.

The toasts and two video tributes by friends, relatives and colleagues, shown during the dinner of butternut squash soup, salad, sea bass or filet mignon and two kinds of dessert, further fostered the family atmosphere. Best man Eric Putz recalled eating ice cream with chopsticks at the home of Robert so the latter didnt have to wash utensils later. Putz quipped, "As a result, I'm the only person who can eat ice cream with chopsticks."

The wedding favor was a CD of Lea and Robert's favorite songs, a wildly diverse compilation ranging from the duo's own recording of "With You I'm Born Again" (which they sang live to cheers), "Two Words," the original ballad which Lea sang during the Mass, to songs made more personal by Lea's playful notes inside the CD case.

Here's why the pair chose to include Jermaine Stewart's "We Don't Have to Take Our Clothes Off": "One of the first songs (we) sang together on (our) first date and, much to the delight of Lea's mom, was the theme of the night."

Of Diana Ross and Lionel Richie's "Endless Love": "This is (our) karaoke song. Perhaps (we) will perform this song at (our) 25th wedding anniversary."

HERE COMES the bride (clockwise from left) walking down the aisle, hugging mom Ligaya while brod Gerard beams, and listening to best man Eric Putz offer a toast to her and Robert.

Bouquet splits

Perhaps no one was more thrilled that evening than Christine Yasunaga who revealed in one of the video tributes that she tried at least three times to "set up" her cousin Robert and Lea before sparks finally ignited.

The mood indeed lived up to what New York-based actor Victor Lirio, the wedding coordinator and Lea's friend, told INQUIRER Entertainment a few days before the big day: "The wedding will pretty much represent Lea and Rob as individuals and as a couple—simple, understated and a whole lot of fun. It will be very simple and understated. At the Biltmore, the room will be elegant, the ambiance will be festive."

The bridal bouquet split in mid-air after Lea threw it so two, not one, women had the luck of catching the clusters of lush red rose blooms: Charlene Carabeo, Lea's fellow actress in the LA revival of "Flower Drum Song," and Cynthia Casasola, one of the bridesmaids.

Putz caught the garter which was almost snagged by Ray Madronio. A conga line sneaked through the elegant Gold Room to the tune of Gloria Estefan's "Conga."

When the reception finally ended, Lea, Robert and their closest friends trekked to the Biltmore's presidential suite for an "after party." Evoking the night when Robert proposed to Lea, the huge suite—much to the couple's surprise—was strewn with red rose petals. Red petals were also floating in the bathtub while candles flickered and nearby, a bottle of champagne and two glasses awaited the newlyweds.

RED IS THE COLOR of the day Lea and Robert are wed. The newlyweds join (from left) INQUIRER's LA correspondents Ruben and Janet Nepales, Myrna Tee, BMG Records' Rudy Tee, Flora Ramos and Ciso Chan.

PHOTOS BY JANET SUSAN R. NEPALES

"Look Frodo... it's the #1 Movie worldwide."

Breaking boxoffice records everywhere (including the Philippines), THE RETURN OF THE KING has accumulated more than $ 750,000 .000 in 21 days worldwide. It is expected to reach the $1b mark by end of this year, making it the second film to reach the billion mark in motion picture history.

On the local scene, THE RETURN OF THE KING was the king of the 3-day weekend gross .The film broke boxoffice records in Philippines with SM MEGAMALL leading the pack with 3.2m pesos . followed by SM North with 2.9m pesos. Third was Glorietta which grossed 2.3 milllion and fourth place went to SM MANILA with 2m pesos. Rounding out the top five was Greenbelt 3 with 1.9m pesos . The total has reached more than 60m pesos including previews and premiers.

US BOXOFFICE:
With a reported estimate of $14.1M, **The Return of the King** managed to shoot its cume up to a staggering $312.2M. The trilogy ender blasted through the $300M mark on Friday, its 21th day of release and became the second movie in boxoffice history after **Spider-Man** which accomplished in May 2002.

ADVT.

MISALUCHA faces off with Velasquez again.

Lani's first show for 2004

AFTER being postponed due to the visit of US President George W. Bush last October, Lani Misalucha's concert, "Lani Beyond Time," will finally take place at the PICC Plenary Hall on Saturday, Jan. 17.

The concert, Lani's first major one for 2004, has a formidable guest lineup led by Regine Velasquez and Ogie Alcasid.

Lani faced off with Regine, who also started with the talent management company Primeline Inc., owned by Ronnie and Ida Henares, in a recent concert. In the Jan. 17 show, the two divas face off again in a duet of "When You Believe."

Ogie will do a medley of boy band songs. He will also do a duet of "Guilty" with Lani.

Another guest, Luke Mejares, will do a solo and then a duet with Lani. Gabby Eigenmann will show off his singing talent in "Hotel California."

Lani is a regular of GMA 7's "SOP" and a host of "Celebrity Turns with Junie Lee" (Saturdays, 9:30 p.m., GMA 7). In recording, she has just released her second single, "Malaya Ka Na," from her album "Loving You" from Viva Records.

Tickets to "Lani Beyond Time" are available for P1,500, P1,200, P1,000, P800, P450 and P350 at National Bookstore branches, Robinsons department stores, Tower Records and Primeline (897-6170 to 72).

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VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

HOST: We're worried that there will be many injuries due to firecrackers this New Year's Eve. What advice can you give our countrymen to minimize bloody accidents?

Guest: First, don't just light a firecracker just because of all those machismos. Don't use match to lighted, use lighted stick to touch. Don't do your own fireworks display, let others do it abroad a floating barge to minimize pollution. Or else, light fireworks only in official places, where put up some guidelines like present fire trucks. And, if the firecracker not explode, don't make *sayang na*, just let go!

(Thank you for being so helpful!)

***

Host: Aside from injuries, there's the threat of robbers and thieves, because people carry more money during the Christmas season. What has been done to prevent robberies at this time?

Guest: We have more police patrols now to prowl commercial centers and other public places!

(It's thieves who are supposed to prowl, not the cops!)

***

Host: And, the bigger traffic problem during the holidays?

Guest: Don't worry, the traffic we have already put in motion sometime yesterday.

(Now you've *really* got us worried!)

***

Host: How can we tell if our homes are being targeted by robbers?

Guest: In your neighborhood, keep your eyes open for strange people who might pose himself as somebody!

(You're pretty strange yourself!)

***

Host: Who are coming to your debut next week that you consider as your very special guests?

Guest: Well, of course my parents and family here in the Philippines, and especially my distance relatives!

(*Ay*, distance relatives!)

***

Host: How many children are you in your family?

Guest: We are a number of eight.

(Ah, so.)

***

Host: What makes your beach resort truly special and different from

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Pops Fernandez and her sons **Robin** and **Ram** were seen checking out the latest titles at Powerbooks at the Alabang Town Center last Wednesday night.

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10 MANO PO 2

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12 FILIPINAS

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11 HAUNTED OFFICE
12 CRYING LADIES

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2 MALIKMATA
3 KILL BILL VOL. 1
4 BRIDAL SHOWER

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5 ZHO YU'S TRAIN
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8 GOOD BOY!

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1 LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
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5 GOLD (DOLBY) KILL BILL
6 GOLD (SDDS) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
7 GOLD (DOLBY) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
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8 MALIKMATA
9 CAPT BARBEL

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4 (DOLBY) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
5 MALIKMATA

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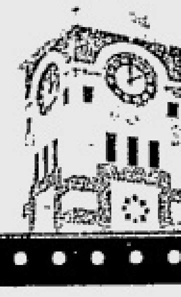

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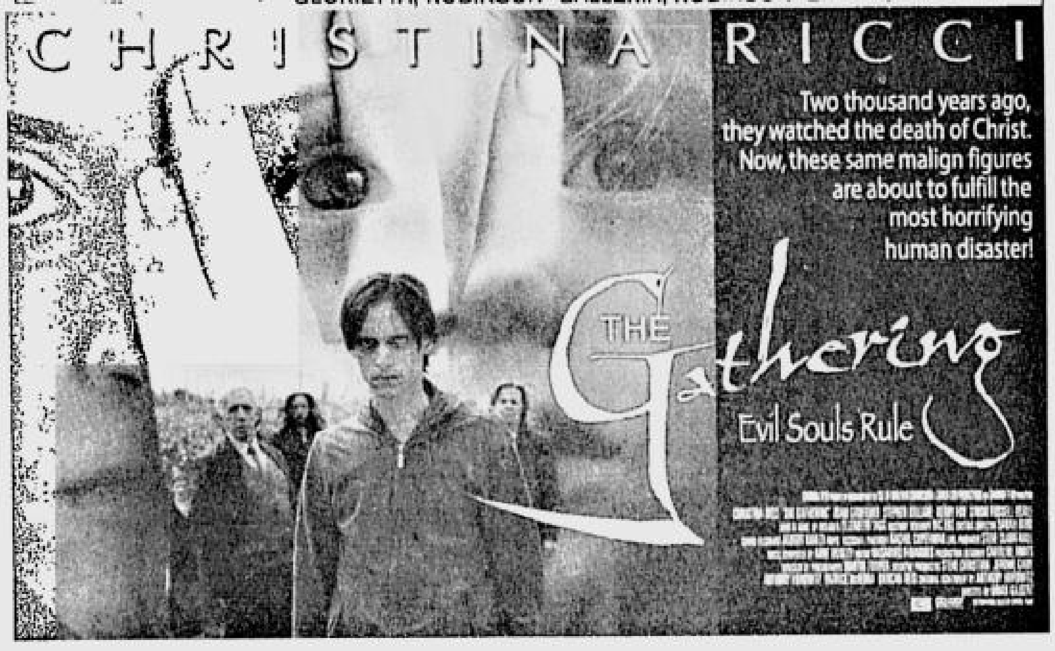
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Distance relatives, respiratory...
From page A28

other places?

Guest: We attract drivers from all over the world, because we have one of the best diving spots!

(Driving? Diving?--*Ano ba talaga, kuya?*)

***

Host: What are your predictions for 2004? What unusual things do you see happening?

Guest: My cards tell me that there will be many weddings, many births, many deaths, and many unwanted pregnancies!

(Gee, thanks. *'Di namin alam 'yon, a !*)

***

Host: What about you, as a professional psychic, what do you predict for next year?

Guest 2: At the start of the year, due to the celebration, there will be many respiratory illments from smoke!

(*Ay*, respiratory illments!)

***

Host: *Kayo naman po, bilang* fortune-teller?

Guest 3: In celebrating the New Year, many people will be injured from throwing hands and other fire incidents!

(We give up!)

Joint book signing

A joint book signing for "Consuming Passions," edited by Dr. **Jaime Laya**, and "Comfort Food," edited by **Linda Panlilio**, will be held at 6 p.m. on Jan. 30 at PowerBooks Greenbelt 4. Call Anvil Publishing at 747-1622.

John and Cash

Pop violinist **John Lesaca** and bass guitarist **Cash Manalang** perform with other veteran musicians at Bykes Cake (call 750-0622) at 9:30 p.m. every Thursday. Lesaca plays rhythm and lead guitar with **Roy Marinduque** (guitar), **Tony Sabalza** (conga), **Rod Peñalosa** (timbales, **Carlo Gaa** (keyboard) and **Lauro Alcala** (drums).

Other features: Mondays, DJ **Luis**. Wednesdays, Cool Change. Fridays, Rhythm and Babes back-to-back with Bedroom Boys. Saturdays, R & B Corp.

'Chasing Liberty'

In her latest starrer, "Chasing Liberty," **Mandy Moore** plays the 18-year-old daughter of the US president. Yearning for a little privacy while on a diplomatic trip to Europe with her father, she begs him to allow her to go on a rare evening out alone, unescorted by the usual security detail.

Later, however, her dad has second thoughts, so Mandy's character is compelled to go on the run, causing a major security flap. In the end, however, she finds the experience worth all the fuss and bother, because it has enabled her to assert independence, and to get her taste of freedom despite her rigorously supervised existence.

DID YOU KNOW...

Korina Sanchez and Dyan Castillejos, and a third woman lunched at Alba's Restaurant on Tomas Morato in Quezon on Monday. Korina was in a Bench long-sleeved shirt.

SANTOS

‘Star in a Million’ album

“STAR in a Million,” the ABS-CBN talent search, has produced such promising talents as Christian Bautista, Erik Santos, Gayle Dizon, Czarina Rosales, Marinel Santos, DK Tijam, Michell San Miguel, Teresa Garcia, Sheryn Mae Regis and Johann Escañan. They are being groomed to follow in the footsteps of big stars Martin Nievera, Gary Valenciano, Lani Misalucha and Regine Velasquez.

Last Jan. 3, the Saturday afternoon show ended with Erik Santos being hailed as the star. He brought home the grand prize of P1 million and a house and lot.

Erik and the other finalists are featured in the “Star in a Million” album, from Star Records. It includes a VCD of the music videos of all 10 songs sung by the finalists.

Produced by Jonathan Manalo, the album is a mix of genres, from classical to alternative, R&B to pop and ballad to jazz.

The “Star in a Million” album is available on CDs and cassettes.

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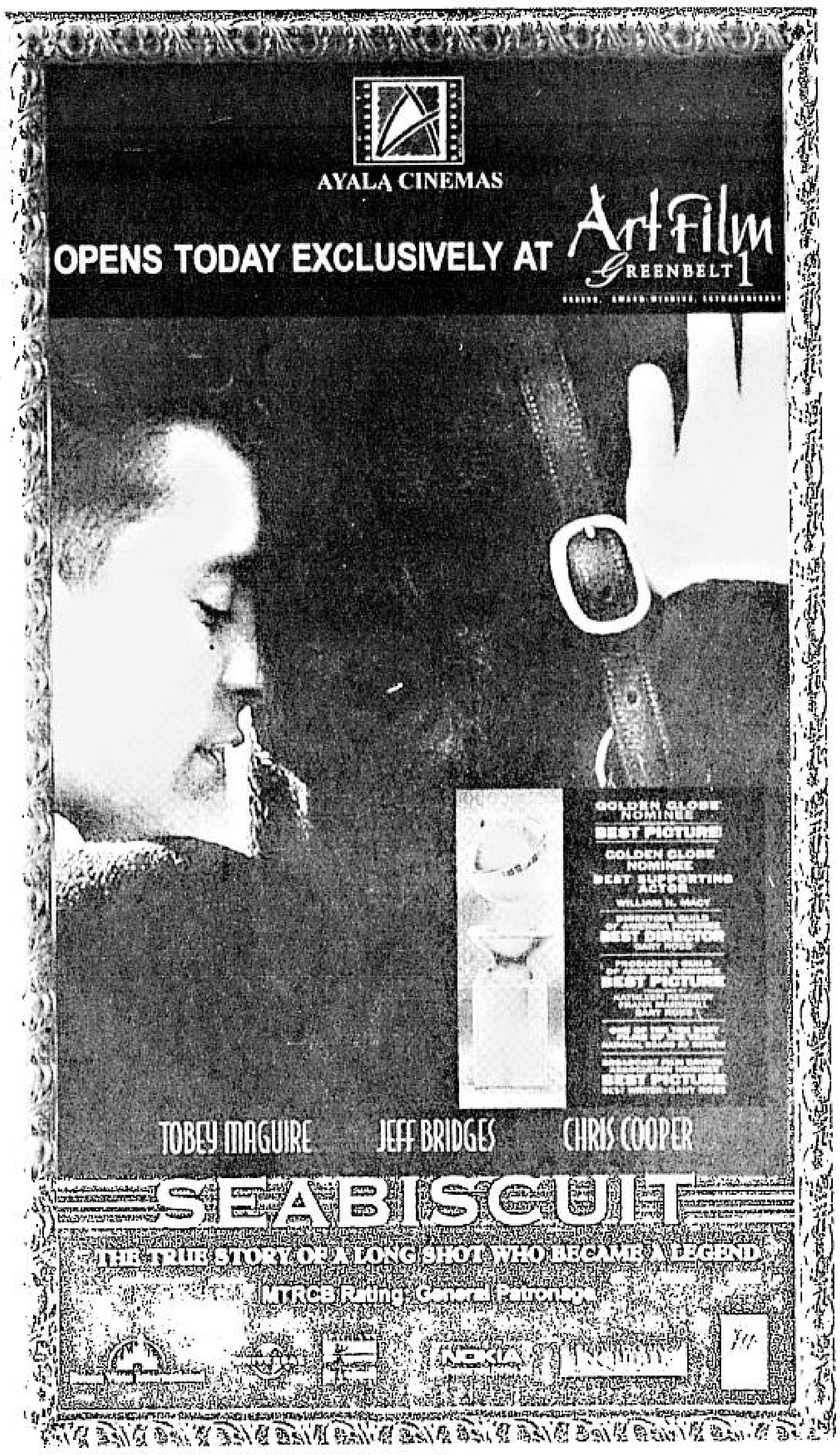
THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE RETURN OF THE KING



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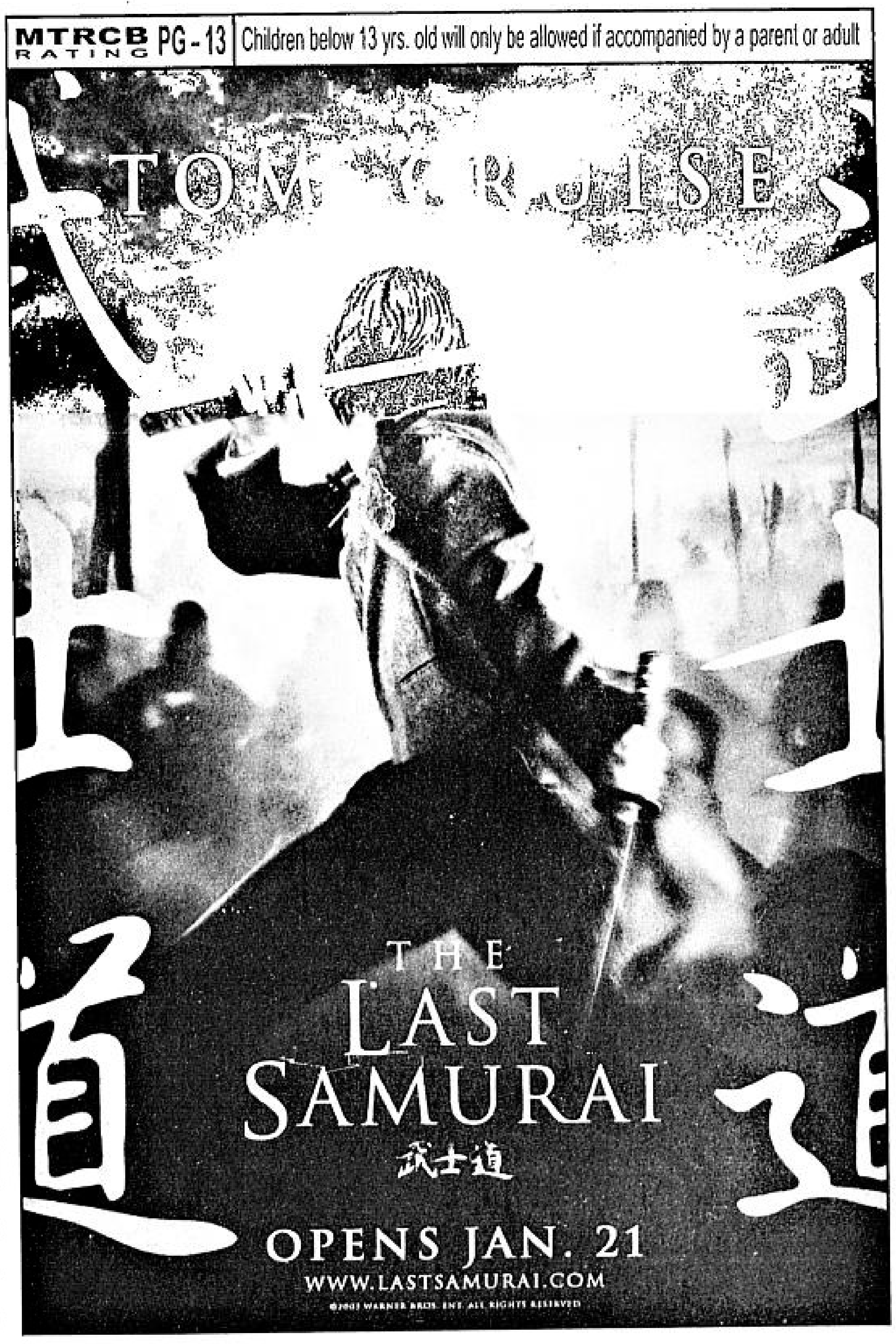

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Araneta Center
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Ali 3	KILL BILL
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TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY / LEGEND OF CROCODILE

QUEZON CITY

ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	BRIDAL SHOWER
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR

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A	SEX SCANDAL
B	LORD OF THE RINGS
C	

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CINEMA-1	MANO PO 2
CINEMA-2	MALIKMATA
CINEMA-3	FANTASTIC MAN
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LOTR 3 RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	CAPTAIN BARBELL
CINEMA-6	FILIPINAS
CINEMA-7	GAGAMBOY
CINEMA-8	CRYING LADIES
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	LOTR 3 RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LOTR 3 RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	LOTR 3 RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-12	LOTR 3 RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-14	KILL BILL
CINEMA-15	BRIDAL SHOWER

LORES

CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT

NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN

(LAS PINAS)	LORD OF THE RINGS 3
CINEMA-1	GOOD BOY
CINEMA-2	HOMECOMING
CINEMA-4	SCARY MOVIE 3

UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL

(PARANAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK I
CINEMA-4	SELDA

DOH: Fears of epidemic unfounded
Lacson-Pere... Showdown

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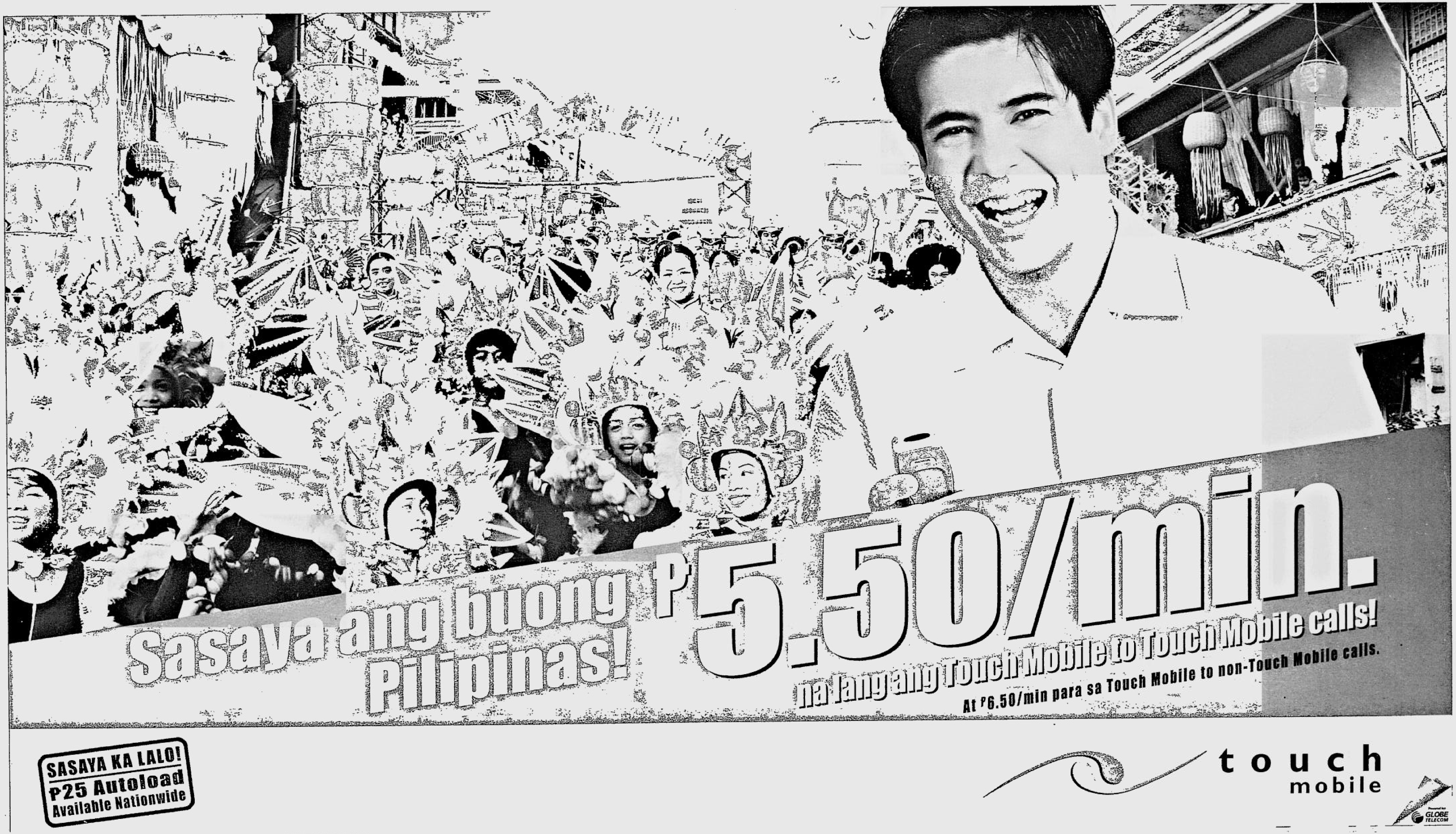
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Mirant readies ₱18-B public offering

By Ronnel W. Domingo

ENERGY firm Mirant Philippines Corp. yesterday said long-drawn preparations were underway for an initial public offering of 10 percent of its shares estimated to be worth P18 billion.

Company president Edgardo Bautista said yesterday in an interview the amount was "a very rough figure."

The local unit of Atlanta, Georgia-based Mirant Corp. owns power plants with more than 2,000 megawatts of installed generating capacity nationwide, inlcuding the 1,218-MW Sual coal-fired plant in Pangasinan and the 735-MW Pagbilao plant in Quezon.

The biggest independent power producer in the country also owns a stake in the 1,200-MW Ilijan natural gas-fired power plant in Batangas.

Bautista said the company had to be ready internally for the IPO, which company officials said had been part of their business plans since the firm started in the country in the early 1990s.

"We have to prepare organizationally as well as in the aspect of valuation," he said. "There are so many things to do and (preparations) would take quite a while."

In August last year, Mirant officials said a financial adviser on the IPO would be named in early in 2004.

Back then, visiting Mirant Corp. president Marce Fuller said: "It is very important to us that (the IPO) be a very successful offering and we want to time it (in such a way that it would be so)."

Fuller had said Mirant was considering to list 10 percent of the company shares, or what the market could absorb.

She also said Mirant's recent investments were steps to get to a successful offering.

In answer to a creeping power shortage on Panay Island, Mirant had also committed to a P1-billion joint venture with Metrobank subsidiary Global Business Holdings Inc. to build an additional 40 MW of generating capacity in Iloilo City.

Aside from that, the power firm is pouring in P600 million to put up two diesel-fired plants in Aklan with a combined capacity of 12.5 MW.

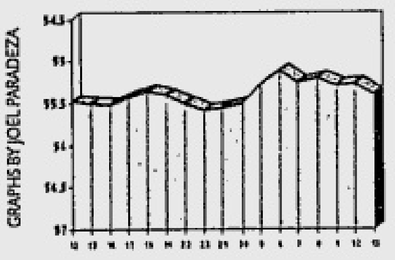
The generators would be built under 20-year, build-own-operate agreements with the Aklan Electric Cooperative or Akelco.

The energy firm's parent company last year filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States, but officials stressed that the move did not affect subsidiaries outside the United States.

Mirant Philippines reported a net income for 2002 of "more or less the same level" of 2001 earnings of P8.6 billion.

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



DECEMBER JANUARY

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

₱55.40 = $1
As of 5 p.m., Jan. 13, 2003

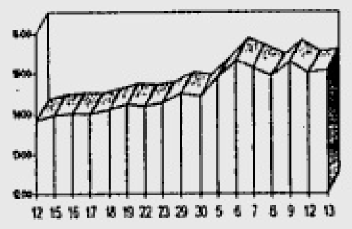
¥106.54 = $1
As of 5 p.m., Jan. 13, 2003

GOLD: $423.50-424.00
per ounce Hong Kong. Jan. 13, 2003

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

DECEMBER JANUARY



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Stocks end slightly up

STOCKS ended slightly higher yesterday, propped up by buying in Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) and other selected blue chips.

Concerns remain in the run-up to the country's election on May 10 but analysts said the market quickly recovered from a technical correction on Monday as investors were optimistic about the outlook for Meralco, the largest electricity distributor.

Meralco's B-shares, which are open to foreigners, rose 10.61 percent or P3.50 to P36.50. Its A-shares, restricted to Filipinos, surged 17.57 percent or P3.25 to P21.27.

"The buying interest is still there for Meralco," said First Grade Holdings managing director Astro del Castillo.

The main index rose 6.15 points or 0.41 percent to 1,507.17 points.

Turnover rose to P1.14 billion from Monday's P1.05 billion. Gainers beat losers 43 to 21 and there were 37 stocks unchanged. *Reuters*

Gov't sells P3.25-B T-bonds

THE BUREAU of Treasury yesterday raised P3.25 billion from the auction of five-year treasury bonds.

The Treasury said the coupon rate for the T-bonds was pegged at 10.75 percent or 50 basis points higher than the 10.2-percent rate during the previous auction.

This represented a partial award of the P4.5-billion offering. There were P12.8 billion worth of tenders, indicating sufficient liquidity in the market.

Fixed income traders said interest rates have bottomed out and were really on an uptrend as banks started pricing in the political and security risks linked to the May presidential elections.

At the same time, however, there was still a sluggish demand for loans, leaving banks with a lot of excess funds which they want to invest in government securities. *Doris C. Dumlao*

INTEREST RATES

Jan. 13, 2004-MART1 Rates Benchmark Interest Rates	MART1 13-Jan-04	MART1 12-Jan-04
1 Month	6.3821	6.4182
3 Months	6.5107	6.525
6 Months	7.9643	7.9625
1 Year	8.4946	8.5232
2 Years	9.2679	9.2982
3 Years	10.2017	10.2339
4 Years	10.6417	10.6554
5 Years	11.0493	10.05
7 Years	11.31	11.3357
10 Years	11.555	11.5732
20 Years	11.9589	11.9679
25 Years	12.2393	12.2643

SOURCE: MART/BLOOMBERG

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BUSINESS

Back to the real world

MR. BEARBULL

Ron Nathan

AFTER my flight of fantasy last week, we have to return to the real world but before so doing, I would like to conclude my holiday narrative as I ran out of space. We had a pleasant room with air-conditioning, multi-channel TV and a full-size bathtub. But the guy next door, who had also paid $75, had an extra golf room that he never stopped boasting about. The floor was green plastic to resemble grass, there was an array of putters in a bag and in the center was a hole with a flag. Every time he sank a putt, the ball went down a tube into a basket in the basement. As soon as it was full, a bellboy would bring it up so he could play all day long. As we departed, we had nothing to pay as the price was all-inclusive, but he was presented with a bill for US$400. Of course, he went berserk until the manager explained, "Some hotels get you by overcharging for the rooms. We get you by the balls."

On our last night, we were taken to dine in a magnificent Chinese restaurant but the lights were so bright, I had to ask them to dim sum. We arrived at the airport and I was pleasantly surprised to see not a hot air balloon but a 4-engine jet. It was a Lear jet that had been stretched to accommodate 300 passengers. I knew the pilot, Jack Hawkins, so I yelled out, "Hi, Jack," and was immediately surrounded by 4 armed air marshals. Forewarned is forearmed. We eventually got it sorted out but the flight was delayed by an hour.

The ascent was smooth and we were soon cruising at 37,000 feet. About 25 minutes into the flight, there was a tremendous bang, and one of the engines flamed out. Within a few minutes, the captain informed us that there was no cause for concern but we would be 10 minutes late. We relaxed but 20 minutes later, another engine caught fire and shut down. The captain told us that the plane could easily fly on two engines and there was nothing to worry about, but we would be 30 minutes late. This calmed us down until 15 minutes later, a third engine blew out. The captain tried to quell the panic by saying we could still reach Manila on one engine, but we would be an hour late. Then the lady behind me said, "If the other engine cuts out, we will probably be up here all night."

We were carrying 10 heavy crates of cogs for Datsun cars and the captain decided to lighten the load by jettisoning them. However, as we were already over the Philippines, he did not want to risk dropping them on a populated area, so he opened up the crates and tipped out all the contents. Two farmers in Laoag looked up in the sky and said, "Look, it's raining Datsun cogs."

* * * *

Back to reality. First of all, do not be alarmed by reports that the election will be delayed indefinitely. This cannot happen unless martial law is declared and this will not happen. The most probable scenario is that the Supreme Court will decide that the automated computers are not ready yet and that counting will be done by hand. Then the secretary of education will declare that he cannot spare all the teachers as this would interfere with the students' exams so only one percent of the teachers would be available. The Dead Slow count will then go into force and the result will not be known for six years.

When I left on Dec. 29, the degree of risk on the Phisix reached 100 for the first time since I had been tracking it through 2003. I told all subscribers to sell on the slightest sign of weakness as the market was due for a two-to three-week correction. Next day, the index opened 14 points higher on Wall Street, but it soon stalled as profit taking got underway and by the close, the index was down 16 points. Most of my readers heeded my advice and sold right at the very top. One lady emailed me to tell me she had sold SMPH at P7. The market continued lower except for last Friday when people bought, thinking the election would be postponed. The risk factor is now 65. It again succeeded in predicting the absolute peak a day ahead. Even I am astonished at its consistent performance.

One notable exception was MERB, which I sent out as a BUY, and within four days, it has risen P9. Over the course of the year, I expect to see it appreciably higher as this year's profits may triple and the stock is selling on a prospective price/earnings ratio of only 6.5 for 2004. My one-year price target is P50 for MERB. The stock has risen so fast that it might be wise to wait for a correction.

Last year's recommendations have done extraordinarily well. TEL is up from P226 to P935 after P1,050. GLO has risen from P410 to P900, after P985, and PCOR from P1.80 to P2.55. I expect another 20-centavo dividend from PCOR, which puts it on a yield of 8.1 percent, and I would not be surprised if some months later it declares a 15-percent stock dividend. As for TEL and GLO, I anticipate a rebound just ahead of the results due next month, followed by a decline immediately afterwards.

Turning to the US, the market has had an excellent 2003 with the Nasdaq up 50 percent and the DOW up 25 percent. Profits for the last quarter have just commenced with the results from ALCOA a penny ahead of estimates. Over the next month, there will be thousands of results to be announced, and most of them will be slightly ahead of expectations. For 2003, net profits will probably be up by at least 17 percent but this has been factored into the price. Any company that does not measure up will be severely dealt with as the level of the indices in quite demanding.

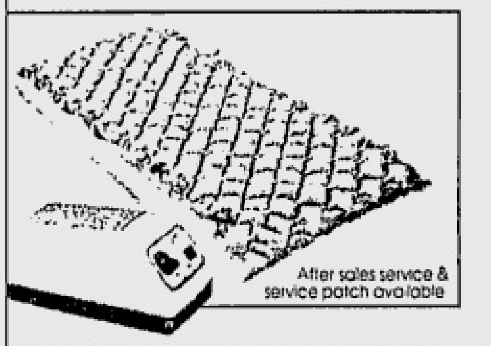
For this year, analysts are expecting profits to rise by 13 percent but their forecasting does not impress me. They confidently predicted that 140,000 to 150,000 jobs would be created in December, but the actual figure was 1,000 and that included 30,000 workers hired temporarily to help over the Christmas season. The market was shocked and the DOW fell 133 points.

What is happening is that companies have become more efficient than they have ever been and as a result, they can increase productivity and profits without hiring extra staff. So at the moment, the government is faced with a jobless recovery. They are hoping that as the economy continues to grow this year at about 5 percent, companies will eventually be forced to take on more workers but this is more likely to apply to the service industry than to manufacturing.

The rest of Asia had a boom year, and the Morgan Stanley Asia Pacific index hit a 3-year high. First place went to Thailand, where the stock market rose 120 percent in dollar terms. All Asian countries reported double digit increases in exports except for the Philippines that dropped 7 percent last month, the sixth decline in eight months. China's exports for December rose an incredible 51 percent with GDP at 8 percent.

As for currencies, the dollar looks as if it is in a barrel going over Niagara Falls. In a few years, the euro has appreciated 50 percent from .85 to 1.28 and the pound has risen from 1.34 to 1.84. The baht has strengthened from 55 to 39, the Australian dollar has soared from .52 to .77, and only the Philippine peso has failed to improve against a very weak dollar. Not a performance to be proud of.

bearbull2010@yahoo.com.



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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND BANKING GROUP LIMITED
3rd Flr. Tower One Ayala Triangle, Ayala Avenue, Makati City

STATEMENT OF CONDITION
As of December 16, 2003

ASSETS		Amount
Cash and Cash Items	P	3,050,473.13
Due from Central Bank		167,319,768.80
Due from Other Banks		1,115,386,573.72
Interbank Loans Receivable		250,000,000.00
Trading Account Securities		
Investments in Bonds and Other Debt Instruments (Net)		2,768,725,078.11
Loans, Discounts & Advances (Net)		2,865,566,437.57
Equity Investments (Net)		2,570,850.00
Due from Head Office/Branches/Agencies Abroad		2,112,421,477.07
Bank Premises, Furnitures, Fixtures & Equipments (Net)		23,020,780.04
Other Assets (Net)		
Others		113,701,508.12
TOTAL ASSETS	P	9,422,361,055.56

LIABILITIES		
Demand Deposits	P	248,565,008.07
Savings Deposits		1,075,346,153.91
Time Deposits		3,240,312,769.00
Special/Other Deposits		12,624,803.92
Due to Central Bank		3,009,228.13
Due to Head Office/Branches/Agencies Abroad		4,058,010,890.22
Outstanding Checks/Payment Orders		1,824,458.64
Bills Payable		
Interbank Borrowings		64,456,740.04
Unearned Income and Other Deferred Credits		549,987.46
Other Liabilities		175,529,218.97
TOTAL LIABILITIES	P	8,950,512,268.16

CAPITAL ACCOUNTS		Amount
Assigned Capital	P	444,323,034.54
Other Capital Accounts		27,526,052.86
TOTAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	471,849,087.40
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	9,422,361,055.56

CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS		
Unused Commercial Letters of Credit	P	1,828,045,722.82
Spot/Future Exchange Bought		2,210,203,853.54
Spot/Future Exchange Sold		2,160,750,294.48
Other Contingent Accounts		1,001,203,925.34
TOTAL CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS	P	7,000,200,806.18

LIST OF SENIOR OFFICERS:

Mr. Johnny Co	General Manager and Country Head
Mr. Kim Chan	Chief Operating Officer
Mr. Nonilo Cruz	Senior Vice President - Business Banking
Ms. Regina Fajardo	Vice President - Operations
Mrs. Bee Lian So	Vice President - International Services
Ms. Leah Espino	Assistant Vice President - Personal Banking
Mr. Arlino Magsakay	Assistant Vice President - Regulatory Compliance

Other Information

1	Deposits of	
	a Government	nil
	b Banks	301,100.00
	c Trust Department	nil
2	Compliance with Magna Carta Law	
	Prescribed Ratio: 6% Small Ent. / 2% Medium Ent.	
	Actual Compliance: 100% / 112%	
3	Amount of Non Performing Loans	149,123,381.00
4	Ratio of Non Performing loans to total loan portfolio	4.45%
5	Amount of classified loans and other risk assets	149,150,322.00
* 6	General Provision for Loan Losses	130,559,228.15
7	Specific Provision for Loan Losses	74,578,475.75
8	Return on Equity (ROE) - Based on Assigned Capital	24.24%
	Return on Equity (ROE) - Based on Shareholder's Equity	18.51%
	Return on Equity (ROE) - inclusive of Net Due to HO	4.85%
9	Amount of DOSRI loans/advances	5,342,654.64
10	Ratio of DOSRI loans/adv to total loans/advances	0.18%
11	Amount of Past Due DOSRI loans /advances	nil
12	Ratio of Past Due DOSRI loans/adv to total loan portfolio	nil
13	"Net Due to Head Office/Branches/Agencies Abroad" forms part of capital of Philippine Branch of foreign bank	1,985,560,413.15

*Amended to conform with Circular No. 200 dated August 17, 1999 and Memorandum to All Banks dated November 29, 1999

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
MAKATI CITY) S.S.

WE JOHNNY CO and KIM CHAN of the above-mentioned bank do solemnly swear that all matters set forth in the above statement of condition are true and correct to the best of our knowledge and belief

JOHNNY CO
General Manager and
Country Head

KIM CHAN
Chief Operating Officer

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me this January 9, 2004, affiants exhibiting to me their Community Tax Certificate No. 14442363, issued at Makati City, on Feb 21, 2003 and Passport No. E7048749, issued at Jakarta Indonesia, on June 2, 1998

(SGD.) BENJAMIN MATA
NOTARY PUBLIC
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PTR No. A 241088
Date Issued JAN. 2, 2004

Doc. No. 219
Book No. 45
Page No. VIII
Series of 04

Terms of new ADB facility OKd

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE ASIAN Development Bank yesterday approved the terms of a 15-year, $200-million currency swap deal with the Philippines and a financing facility for Philippine companies, a pioneering project that seeks to boost long-term funds for priority sectors.

In a press briefing yesterday, ADB senior structured finance specialist Ajay Sagar said the ADB was now exploring ways to replicate this project in other developing markets including Indonesia and Bangladesh.

"This is a highly innovative pilot project that aims to promote private sector and capital markets development in the Philippines," Sagar said.

"It not only marks the first time that ADB is providing long-term peso financing in the Philippines. It is also ADB's first local currency swap deal with a government," he added.

Under the blueprint approved by the ADB board, the bank will execute cross currency swaps with the Philippine government to raise pesos for the facility.

The peso funds raised will be loaned to banks at a fixed interest rate without government guarantee. The accredited banks will, in turn, lend to local businesses in targeted sectors, including infrastructure, transport, manufacturing, small and medium enterprises, housing and environmental improvement.

However, the ADB said it would not allow lending to projects involving the processing of narcotics, spirits, tobacco and radioactive materials or environmentally hazardous activities.

The project seeks to help borrowers meet long-term funding needs and boost their financial viability by avoiding currency and maturity mismatches.

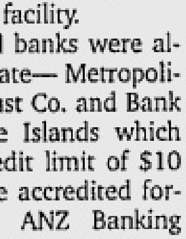
The ADB noted that at present, there was a short supply of long-term fixed interest rate peso financing in the country.

The multilateral lender has accredited 17 banks operating in the Philippines— mainly international banks with a Standard and Poor's long-term rating of BBB or better which can borrow up to $75 million under the facility.

Only two local banks were allowed to participate— Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. and Bank of the Philippine Islands which were given a credit limit of $10 million each. The accredited foreign banks are ANZ Banking Group Ltd., Bank of America NA, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi Ltd., Citibank NA, Deutsche Bank, Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corp., Internationale Nederlanden Groep Bk, International Commercial Bank of China, JP Morgan Chase Bank, Mizuho Corporate Bank Ltd. and Standard Chartered Bank. The eligible foreign bank subsidiaries are ABN Amro Bank, Chinatrust Philippines, Maybank Philippines Inc. and United Overseas Bank Philippines.

Erratum

THE LOGO of Vic Agustin's Cocktales was inadvertently used in yesterday's Breaktime column of Conrad Banal titled "Bucks to the future." Our apologies.



PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of January 13, 2004)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc	4	4	4	4	65,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	17.75	18	17.75	18	65,000
Bank of the Phil. Islands	49.5	50	49.5	49.5	442,500
Citystate Savings Bank	16.25	16.25	16.25	16.25	1,700
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	36.5	38.5	36.5	38	284,100
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.52	0.53	0.52	0.53	840,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	27.5	28.5	27.5	28	122,600
Philippine National Bank	24	24	23.75	24	104,400
Phil. Savings Bank	26.5	26.5	26.5	26.5	5,000
Union Bank of the Phil.	27.5	28.5	27.5	28.5	24,300
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
Bankard Inc.	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.16	65,000
First Abacus Financial	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.8	130,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1850	1850	1850	1850	440
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	50,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	200	200	200	200	20
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1405	1415	1405	1415	3,960
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	26	27	26	26.5	40,800
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.73	0.77	0.73	0.76	8,130,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	945	945	895	910	133,350
Ipeople Inc.	1.18	1.3	1.18	1.28	213,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	1,000,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.04	0.04	0.039	0.04	700,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	1.1	1.24	1.1	1.22	39,920,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	960	960	935	935	170,910
Philweb Corp.	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.012	9,000,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	18.25	21.75	18.25	21.75	2,112,200
Manila Electric Co. B	33	37.5	33	36.5	4,242,900
Petron Corp.	2.44	2.6	2.44	2.55	19,819,000
Salcon Power Corp.	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	20,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	0.95	0.99	0.95	0.99	140,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.3	1.3	1.28	1.28	480,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	154,000
Negros Navigation Co.Inc	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	10,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp.	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.52	100,000
Union Cement Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	26,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	30	30	30	30	32,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	19.5	19.5	19.25	19.5	250,500
RFM Corp.	0.66	0.66	0.65	0.65	1,360,000
San Miguel Corp. A	55	55.5	54.5	55.5	128,900
San Miguel Corp. B	66	66.5	66	66.5	206,800
Vitarich Corp.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	200,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Ayala Corp.	5.7	5.9	5.6	5.8	41,194,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	49,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.026	0.026	0.026	0.026	2,600,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	30,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	22,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.62	0.68	0.62	0.66	36,250,000
A Brown Company Inc.	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	11,850,000
Basic Consolidated Inc.	0.12	0.12	0.115	0.115	150,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.195	0.2	0.195	0.2	740,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.043	500,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.27	1,430,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	21.75	24.75	21.75	24.5	3,349,700
Global Business Hldgs Inc.	52	52	52	52	500
Ionics Inc.	1.58	1.66	1.58	1.6	440,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	1,162,000
Macroasia Corp.	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.61	110,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.1	1.1	1.08	1.08	2,389,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.29	0.3	0.29	0.3	9,530,000
Music Corp.	0.39	0.39	0.36	0.37	1,230,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	200,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	400,000
South China Resources Inc.	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22	500,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	12.75	12.75	12.75	12.75	121,500
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Federal Chemicals Inc.	4	4	4	4	20,000
Interphil Labs Inc. A	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	225,000
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp.	7.2	7.2	7.2	7.2	4,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	100,000
Steniel Manufacturing	0.15	0.18	0.15	0.18	370,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp	0.54	0.55	0.54	0.55	900,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	10,000
Philippine Racing Club	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	46,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	26	26.5	26	26.5	1,349,300
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Y	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	500
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Z	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	6,600
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	6.1	6.3	6.1	6.2	4,300,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	10,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.165	0.17	0.165	0.17	190,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	440,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.21	0.215	0.21	0.215	2,450,000
Filinvest Land Inc	1.06	1.1	1.04	1.1	6,003,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	850,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.18	0.185	0.18	0.185	200,000
Philippine Estates Corp.	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	20,000
Primex Corp.	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	50,000
SM Development Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	90,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.4	6.4	6,580,000
MINING					
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.96	50,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.22	0.225	0.22	0.225	800,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	250,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	10,000,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.0075	0.008	0.0075	0.008	5,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	3,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.42	0.43	0.42	0.43	1,720,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.44	0.45	0.44	0.45	4,680,000
OIL					
Imperial Res	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	3,600,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	67,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	30,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	70,000
Pacifica	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	11,000,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	600,000

DISCLOSURES

FEDERAL Chemicals Inc.'s 25 million shares that were locked up in an escrow agreement last Dec. 12, 2001 can now be traded.

* * *

A. SORIANO Corp.'s 500,000 shares were bought by its wholly owned subsidiary, Anscor Consolidated Corp.

* * *

D.M. Consunji Inc., wholly owned company of DMCI Holdings Inc., filed a petition for the corporate rehabilitation of Universal Rightfield Property Holdings Inc.

* * *

PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. disclosed the purchase by Ray Espinosa, a company director, of 1,000 PLDT shares at P1,020 each.

* * *

PCI Leasing and Finance Inc. bought 130,000 of its own shares at P1.32 each.

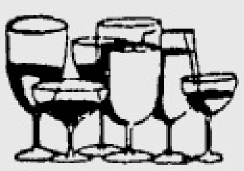
* * *

PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange Inc. clarified that no formal agreement has been reached with the Australian Stock Exchange that was reported to have expressed interest in acquiring an equity stake in PSE. ***Compiled by Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

January 13, 2004 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.784560	1.000000	55.241000
Japan	Yen	0.007354	0.009373	0.517800
United Kingdom	Pound	1.449082	1.847000	102.030100
Hongkong	Dollar	0.101070	0.128824	7.116400
Switzerland	Franc	0.638945	0.814399	44.988200
Canada	Dollar	0.615100	0.784006	43.309300
Singapore	Dollar	0.463742	0.591086	32.652200
Australia	Dollar	0.610220	0.777786	42.965700
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.081171	2.652661	146.535600
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.209216	0.266667	14.731000
Brunei	Dollar	0.462376	0.589345	32.556000
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000094	0.000120	0.006600
Thailand	Baht	0.020205	0.025753	1.422600
UAE	Dirham	0.213625	0.272287	15.041400
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.274600	70.410200
Argentina	Peso	0.274321	0.349650	19.315000
Brazil	Real	0.279501	0.356252	19.679700
Denmark	Kroner	0.134257	0.171124	9.453100
India	Rupee	0.017285	0.022031	1.217000
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.206491	0.263193	14.539000
Mexico	New Peso	0.072477	0.092379	5.103100
New Zealand	Dollar	0.535938	0.683107	37.735500
Norway	Kroner	0.116169	0.148069	8.179500
Pakistan	Rupee	0.013644	0.017391	0.960700
South Africa	Rand	0.113212	0.144300	7.971300
Korea	Won	0.000668	0.000852	0.047100
Sweden	Kroner	0.109619	0.139721	7.718300
Syria	Pound	0.015384	0.019608	1.083200
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023357	0.029771	1.644600
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000492	0.000627	0.034600

Pearl Harbor, 2004



COCKTALES

Victor C. Agustin

IN A telecom version of Pearl Harbor, the United States invited telecom executives from the Philippines to attend an international conference in Hawaii, only to have FBI agents sprung subpoenas to the Philippine delegates right in their hotel rooms.

About 30 Philippine delegates, led by Telecommunications Undersecretary Virgilio Peña, were attending the Jan. 11-14 Pacific Telecom Conference in the Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach in Honolulu when a combined team from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US Department of Justice knocked on each Philippine delegate's room to serve the subpoenas, according to industry sources.

The subpoenas commanded the recipients to appear before the US District Court in Honolulu starting tomorrow for a series of grand jury hearings about alleged anti-trust violations committed by Philippine telecom companies against US carriers over interconnection fees.

According to a Filipino lawyer, the anti-trust investigation was being carried out by the US Department of Justice despite the American and Philippine carriers having already amicably settled the row.

Among those ordered to appear in tomorrow's hearing was Perla Ignacio of Digital Telecommunications. Ignacio has been advised by her Manila office to stay behind and cooperate in the investigation even without the benefit of a counsel.

In the meantime, the large PLDT-Smart delegation, led by NTT representative in PLDT board Taketo Suzuki, left in disgust without finishing the conference, according to the grapevine. PLDT senior vice president Alfredo Panlilio and Smart's legal and carrier business chief Rogelio Quevedo were scheduled to arrive last night.

The PLDT-Smart executives are being summoned to appear in the Honolulu court starting Jan. 21.

Globe executives led by Gil Genio also received their summonses, as well as Mabuhay Satellite president/CEO Gary Pimentel. The managing director of ABS-CBN Telecom, Zenon Carlos, and the vice president for sales and marketing of Eastern Telecommunications, Virgilio Pedro, were also listed as conference delegates although it was not immediately clear if the two were among those served.

In addition to the personal appearances by their respective executives, the Philippine telecom companies are being required to produce voluminous electronic and paper documents for a parallel set of hearings, also in Honolulu, starting late next month.

The US State Department apparently knew in advance that a large Philippine delegation was attending the international conference.

The conference has four US government officials listed as delegates, including Ambassador David Gross, who was identified as US Coordinator, International Communications and Information Policy of the US State Department.

Ignoring the US court summons could mean a warrant of arrest waiting for the Philippine executives the next time they step on American shore, just like what had happened to former Central Bank Governor Jaime Laya during the early Aquino years.

Laya, who was then being sought as a witness in the celebrated New York trial against the Marcoses, was detained at the Honolulu airport upon arrival and was only freed after posting bail.

High anxiety

THE INFLIGHT security precautions being imposed by Washington are now bordering between paranoia and plain ludicrousness.

Even the Australian transportation minister has complained about the latest directive from the US Transportation Security Administration requiring that passengers on flights to the United States not to congregate in groups in any areas of the aircraft, especially around the lavatories.

Australia's transportation minister, John Anderson, has described the ban as "a little bit hard to handle," considering the length of the trans-Pacific flights to the US mainland and the passenger-toilet ratio in the economy section.

Philippine Airlines, which flies non-stop to Los Angeles and San Francisco from Manila, and the local Northwest Airlines office refused to comment on the new security measure, which apparently took effect only this month.

Lucky Linggoy

ACTIVIST Jose "Linggoy" Alcuaz has all these months been painting himself as a "resigned" director of the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office as he continued to hit the GMA administration and score Edsa II and Edsa III points for himself.

What he has not been telling his gullible listeners is that he was until last month been collecting his salary + allowances and religiously attending board meetings of the PCSO.

If you want to countercheck this info, ask fellow PCSO director/Cory aide Margie Juico.

Heard through the grapevine

EXECUTIVE Secretary Alberto Romulo has dispatched a team of investigators to Rome to coordinate with the Italian Customs after Malacañang received preliminary documentation that indicated Ambassador to Italy Philippe Lhuillier had paid only euro 4.54 (about P322) in export taxes for the 40-foot container van of "religious junk" that the diplomat shipped to the Philippines.

The more interesting question for the newspaper industry is, which publisher was supposed to receive part of the Lhuillier shipment?

Clue? He is supposed to be everybody's favorite.

(Email: cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com or cocktales_pdi@hotmail.com.)

PSE plans equity sale to big investor

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange plans to sell 20-40 percent of its equity to strategic investors within this year as part of its mandated demutualization process.

In his first press briefing yesterday, newly appointed PSE president Cayetano Paderanga Jr. said the exchange might be able to sell a portion of its stake through private placements by new investors before the year ends.

However, he said he could not give a definite timeframe on when the PSE's demutualization would be completed.

The Securities Regulation Code of 2000 requires the PSE to dilute the shareholdings of brokers to only 20 percent. Although the PSE has now converted itself into a stock corporation and listed its own shares, nearly all of its equity is still held by the brokers.

The plan is for the PSE to offer new shares to the public after listing by introduction last December. Paderanga said the private placement from strategic investors would likely happen first before the public offering.

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590,000	49,167	33,955	27,448	19,635	15,844	13,971

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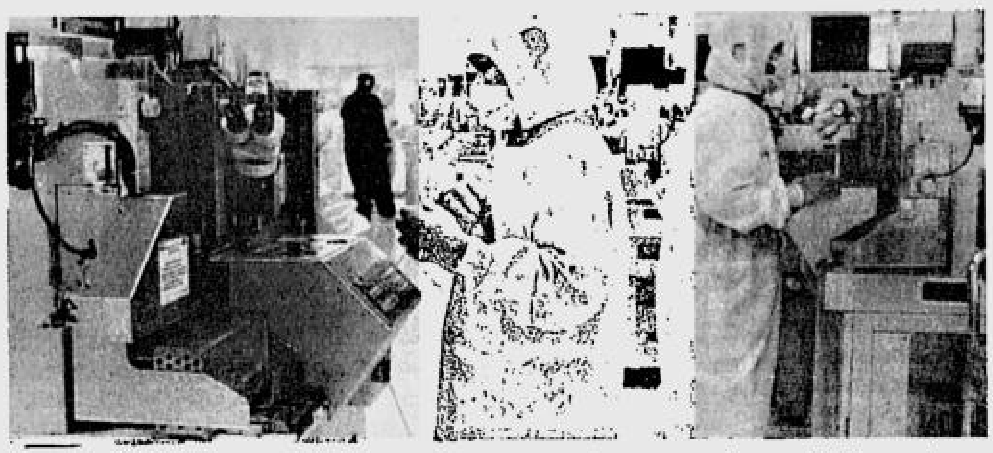


THE GOVERNMENT'S announcement that electronics exports dropped in November caused many analysts to doubt official figures.

Analysts take RP data with a pinch of salt

PHILIPPINE economic data? Pass the salt, many analysts say.

From the size of the debt pile to the economy's performance, those who track the Southeast Asian nation tend to view numbers flowing from government agencies with skepticism that ranges from a touch of doubt to outright suspicion.

Questions about the quality of statistics in emerging markets are common. But in the Philippines, they compound concerns about an economy struggling with a weak peso, foreign debt officially put at $56 billion and exports falling behind a global rebound.

The latest data to raise eyebrows was the sharp 4.9 percent drop in exports in November from a year earlier, including a 10 percent plunge in vital electronics shipments.

The statistics bureau stuck to its guns after analysts queried the extent of the drop but it said adjustments might be made by the time it issues final numbers in mid-January.

An industry group said the official assessment of a huge fall in electronics exports did not seem to match reality.

"Most companies are saying there's no softening of demand since September," Ernesto Santiago, executive director of the Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines, told Reuters. "It's rather strange. Impossible, I would say."

Of nine foreign and local analysts surveyed by Reuters, six voiced reservations about the reliability of Manila's data.

Three of the four Filipinos generally took the figures at face value.

Most noted shortcomings in how the numbers are amassed, with one saying paperless cash deals by some companies to avoid paying tax made tracking even tougher.

The analysts who were most critical did not want to be named, mainly to avoid jeopardizing access to policy makers or affecting business between their financial institutions and the government.

Room for improvement

"They certainly don't have good processes in place," said an economist at a multinational bank in Singapore.

"In some areas, they may be actively deceiving people, particularly in the foreign debt area. But it's difficult to prove."

Jose Isidro L. Camacho, who resigned as finance secretary in November, said he saw no reason why Philippine data would be less accurate than anywhere else.

"We do comply with international practices," Camacho told Reuters. "We are always trying to improve also."

Philippine figures are a mixed bag, another foreign economist said, with fiscal data more accurate than in many parts of Asia but numbers on economic growth, industrial production and balance of payments in need of improvement.

"I would definitely not say that they're trying deliberately to hide something," the second economist said.

"It's simply that they have a problem capturing the trade flows and the exports."

The National Statistics Office, a unit of the National Economic and Development Authority, works with relative autonomy as the main bureau compiling the country's economic numbers.

The central bank, finance department and agriculture agency also issue data and make forecasts.

Most factories and businesses are clustered around Manila and other major cities or in three export zones on the main island of Luzon. Data collection gets tougher further afield in this rugged and largely rural nation of 7,100 islands and 82 million people.

The director of industrial surveys at the National Statistics Office, Stella de Guzman, defended the integrity of the bureau's work and said constant improvements were being made.

"We have long experience in data collection and we have field offices in regional, provincial and some municipal districts. We have confidence that they're doing their job," she told Reuters.

"The Bureau of Customs has an automated database for their imports. That's a relatively new thing. So we're trying to validate the data that we produce with other sources."

Beyond the numbers

Some slip-ups are relatively benign. Treasurer Sergio Edeza said on Jan. 5 the government should have beaten its December 2003 budget deficit target, then reversed course minutes later when he got word about some last-minute spending.

Early last year, there was a more serious episode when the government restated import data for 2000 to 2002.

The problem was massive under-reporting of imported electronics parts, which are then assembled into semiconductors, computer accessories and other finished goods that make up about two-thirds of overall exports.

As the electronics parts and other materials enter three export zones with no duties paid, statistics on the value of the imports were not being fully compiled until recently.

David Fernandez, head of Asia sovereign research at JP Morgan Chase in Singapore, said the Philippines did not stick out in a region known for "dodgy data" and only lazy analysts relied solely on official figures.

"If there are mistakes, if there are problems with it, then there should be consistent problems," he said. "You can't just pick and choose when you want to question the data."

With economic watchers waiting to see whether exports in November were really as grim as initial figures suggested, a fixed-income analyst in Manila said official data everywhere was subject to adjustments and corrections.

"In the States, they always have revisions. It's the same thing here. You take it with a grain of salt," he said. *Reuters*

Philippines grew by 4.4% in 2003, Macapagal says

THE PHILIPPINE economy likely grew 4.4 percent in 2003 and is poised to grow more rapidly at 5.2 percent this year, President Macapagal-Arroyo said Tuesday.

The government had projected growth at between 4.2 and 5.2 percent last year.

Arroyo said in a statement that the strong upturn seen for 2004 reflects a strong construction sector.

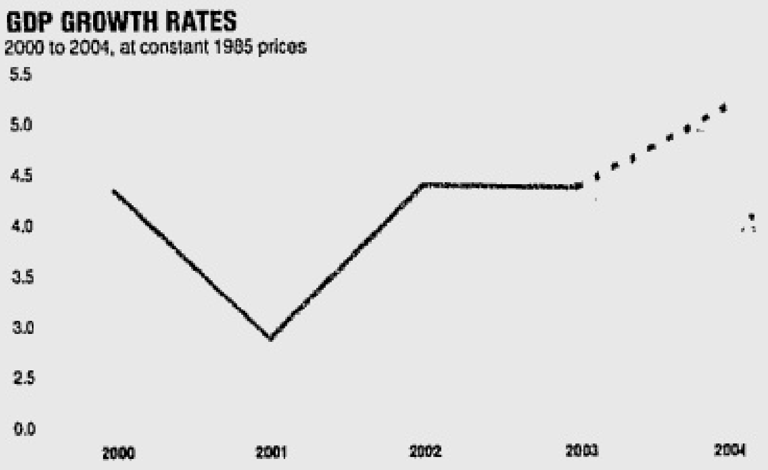
"The economy is moving up. GDP (gross domestic product) expansion accelerated to 4.4 percent (last year), the fastest since the Asian crisis," Macapagal said.

The Philippines was among the nations in the region hit by the 1997/1998 financial crisis which plunged most economies into recession.

Arroyo noted that the construction sector could grow by as much as 7.8 percent this year, leading to more jobs and indicating investor confidence.

The government's economic planning department is expected to announce details of last year's economic performance in February.

Economists had earlier said GDP growth last year was around 4.2 percent, the lower end of the official target. *AFP*



Peza exports rose 23% as of Nov. '03

By Michelle V. Remo

EXPORTS from firms registered with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (Peza) rose 23.4 percent in the first 11 months of 2003, with electronics exporters accounting for the bulk of the revenue.

Peza Director General Lilia De Lima said in a statement that exports in the January-to-November period reached $25.086 billion from $20.335 billion posted in the same period the previous year.

The Baguio City Economic Zone recorded the biggest export revenue of $2.787 billion among the public ecozones.

Firms at the Baguio ecozone include Texas Instruments, one of the country's biggest electronics exporters.

Following BCEZ was the Cavite Economic Zone with $1.8 billion; Mactan Economic Zone, $1.507 billion and Bataan Economic Zone, $264.311 million.

Among the private ecozones, the Laguna Technopark posted the highest export revenue for the period at $6.825 billion.

The biggest exporters located at the Laguna Technopark include Toshiba Information Equipment Philippines and Amkor Technology Philippines Inc.

Other leading Peza export earners include Carmelray Industrial Park II with $2.3 billion and Gateway Business Park with $2.03 billion.

Peza also said employment in ecozones rose to 907,280 in the first 11 months of 2003 from 823,705 during the same period in 2002.

De Lima said the exports growth indicated that the electronics sector, which suffered from depressed global demand in the early part of 2003, has started to rebound.

Indian firm invests in RP; its first in Asia

INDIAN business process outsourcing firm Daksh eServices Private Ltd. has invested $5 million in the Philippines to establish its first wholly owned subsidiary in the Asia-Pacific region.

Executive vice president Pavan Vaish said Daksh eServices Philippines Inc., which will be situated in Makati City, will have 1,000 seats in its first year of operations.

He said operations would begin in the first week of February.

Daksh, which claims to be the fastest growing Indian BPO firm that provides both inbound and outbound services, said its clients include online retailer Amazon.com, Duetsche Bank and General Atlantic Partners.

Vaish said the firm has chosen the Philippines over other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, because of the country's deregulated telecommunications sector and high-quality skills of Filipino workers, especially in information technology and customer care.

He added that although India has the capability to accommodate more BPO operations, branching out to the Philippines was necessary to protect clients from geopolitical risks.

"You have to have a long-term perspective when you go into the BPO business, and we believe the Philippines provide a stable environment," Vaish said in a press briefing yesterday.

He said the company was bullish about the BPO industry in the Philippines, which is estimated to have generated about $1 billion in revenue in 2003.

Aside from the Philippines, Daksh also has offices in the United States and Europe. *Michelle V. Remo*

PRESIDENT Macapagal with new DTI Secretary Cesar V. Purisima. Looking on are his parents, former Justice Fidel Purisima and Mrs. Josepina Purisima.

JERRY CARUAL/PCPO-MALACAÑANG

INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY JUANITA AMATONG

Holding back the tide of burgeoning Philippine debt

ONE month into the new job, the Philippines' first female finance secretary sees hope in the government's attempts to bottle its debt genie, even as many analysts see worrying signs in an uncertain election year.

Following a predecessor whose parting shot was to say the country was in fiscal crisis and with only five months left before a possible change in administration, career bureaucrat Juanita Amatong admits frankly there is not much she can do.

But she says there are signs of improvement in the government's much-maligned finances, including tighter revenue collections, that would make it a mistake for ratings agency Moody's to go ahead with a widely expected downgrade this month.

"Yes, we have fiscal problems but we are not in a crisis situation," the 68-year-old mother of four told Reuters on Monday in her finance department office overlooking Manila bay.

As she spoke, about 50 disgruntled department employees held a rally outside to complain about unreceived pay.

Economists give the government moderate praise for keeping the closely watched deficit within target last year, but are concerned it could slip back in 2004 as election spending, likely higher interest rates and political uncertainty take their toll.

Amatong said the government had taken this into account in reaching this year's P198-billion ($3.6 billion) target for the deficit.

"Unless there are major, major changes that come in 2004, I think our predictions are based on some realities that we already realize," she said.

Despite recent improvements, the country's debt numbers remain frightening, because of rampant tax evasion and huge interest payments, putting it at the top of some analysts' lists of Asian countries most likely to hit a financial crisis.

National government debt was P3.2 trillion at the end of September, around 70 percent of annual GDP, and up a steep 17 percent in just one year. The share of foreign debt is almost half and rising as the government runs out of domestic buyers for its bonds, making the country vulnerable to a fall in the peso.

Nearly a third of government spending—some $4 billion that could be used to build desperately needed roads, hospitals and schools, and to ease poverty—is used up paying interest.

Tax net still leaky

Moody's Investors Service is expected to cut its debt rating by at least one notch soon, leaving the country two notches below investment grade and possibly making it more difficult for Amatong to finance remaining 2004 funding needs of $800 million.

"They should look at our data more carefully," said Amatong, a native of southern Mindanao province and a 20-year veteran of the finance department.

"I think what they are doing is perception. If they only look at our economic indicators and our results for 2003, we did very well," she said.

Amatong said she was discussing with Treasury officials the best timing for debt issuance this year, but added there was no need to float bonds in the first six months.

Notoriously leaky tax collections improved last year, Amatong noted, while long-term plans to strengthen revenue are going ahead. Even so, analysts estimate the tax net only scoops up about 50 to 60 percent of potential revenue.

Politicians in Congress have blocked a bill to raise "sin" taxes on tobacco and alcohol, seemingly underlining former finance secretary Jose Camacho's departing complaint that vested interests continually block attempts at reform.

Amatong said the government was aiming to return to a balanced budget by 2009.

That would require more aggressive rises in revenues, as well as the politically difficult step of cutting back the country's sprawling bureaucracy.

"There's a lot of duplications of functions in our bureaucracy," she said. It's not just depending on how much you can raise. It also depends on the expenditure side of the equation to see where we can get rid of some wastage." *Reuters*

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The National Irrigation Administration - CARAGA Region XIII, Bancasi, Butuan City invites all locally Qualified Consulting Firm, to apply for Pre-qualification to participate in the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Study and finally facilitate in the issuance of Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) for Cantilan Irrigation System Rehabilitation Project (CANTISRP) at Madrid, Surigao del Sur under the Southern Philippines Irrigation Sector Project.

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I - 1) List of EIAs prepared and submitted to the DENR	
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3) List of Irrigation EIA reports prepared	
II - 1) Highest Educational Attainment of Team Leader (TL)	
2) Number of years of TL as TL in EIA activities	
3) List of EIA activities where proposed TL was the team leader	
4) List of EIA team members	
5) Number of EIA experience of each team member	

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not later than February 10, 2004 at 5:00 p.m. and clearly marked "Pre-Qualification Documents for Consultancy Services for the EIA Study for Cantilan Irrigation System Rehabilitation Project (CANTISRP).

The NIA reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive any information found therein and accept/reject such proposals that may be advantageous/disadvantageous to NIA's interest.

(Sgd.) CARLOS S. SALAZAR
Regional Irrigation Manager

(PDI--Jan. 14 & 21, 2004)

E-mail: peopleatwork@inquirer.com.ph

PEOPLE at WORK

Editor Raul O. Marcelo
Subsection Editor Regina Galang Reyes

Pinay overseas worker bewails discrimination

By Emily Abrera,
Chair, McCann-Erikson Phils.

ASK YOUR CEO

I'VE been living in a beautiful island somewhere in the Atlantic for more than a year now. Things were hard for me right from the start and so I had to work myself up. Trying my best by working for an exempt company as a temp during weekdays, I studied in college (on a full scholarship) on Monday nights and I worked as a waitress on weekends. The company that I am working for had seen my potential and gave me a big break by giving me the chance to work full time. Not only that, they also gave me a short-term period of probation rather than undergoing probation for six months. And I am proud to say that I'm the first Filipino to have ever worked for a big company in this prestigious island, the first Filipino to be on a full scholarship, the first to graduate with merit in the course that I am taking and the first Filipino to be employed by an exempt company.

My big problem arose when we had a new temp who is a local person of this country. She has been giving me a hard time by badmouthing me to everybody that she meets and having a negative attitude towards me. Whenever I ask her even just a simple question, she goes on and on about it making me look stupid. It's upsetting and frustrating. I talked to our supervisor, department head and also to the Human Resources head about the situation but instead of doing something about it, they just let it slide. I am definite that I am starting to be a victim of discrimination but what should I do? I'm the only Filipino in our company and in a multinational company here in this island. Should I just leave things alone? Now, they are saying that I should get professional help. I know that I'm not the problem because whenever they have department meetings, I am the only one not included unless the "big cheese" is the one convening the meeting.

I cannot please everybody but I just want to work harmoniously with others. The temp that I'm working for is desperately doing her best to get my officemates' attention while I'm trying my best to keep silent and just do my work. But she keeps on and on after me. I want her to stop but my superiors don't want to listen to me saying that I am the problem because I let things get to me when I should just leave things alone.

It's hard and right now I'm just thinking of looking for another job but running away from this situation won't do me any good. I know the fact that my immediate supervisor likes her and is trying her best to give this temp a permanent job. It's not my business anymore but how come they can't tell her to just leave me alone. She is telling everybody that I'm bossy and that I don't know what I'm doing when in fact I was the one who trained her. Please advise.

First among the rest

Thank you for your letter. Your story is both intriguing and admirable! Indeed, you have many reasons to be happy and proud: you live on a beautiful island, you were granted a full scholarship and graduated with merit; you now have a permanent job, and you even enjoy the distinction of being the first Filipino to work for a big multinational company. It would seem that yours is a position many would envy, and yet you sound miserable … and it's all because of this one person!

Harmony in diversity

As I understand it, this person is still a temporary hire, and is someone you trained. Just like you when you first joined the company, this person wants to showcase her capability, and maybe is overly eager to earn her permanency, too. After all, job security is important, isn't it? You yourself have set a great record, by earning your permanency after a shorter probation than usual. Is it possible she is trying to emulate that?

You mention the idea of harmony somewhere in your letter. It is an ideal all companies aim for but it's not that easy to achieve, especially if the group is big and the individuals come from diverse backgrounds. Maybe many of your coworkers come from different nationalities and even cultures, but perhaps there are more who are local hires, just like the new person. If, as you describe, she has a strong and even aggressive personality, then it's possible that this has made you feel somewhat left out. If there's a language barrier as well, this can add to your feeling of being excluded from the rest.

Reflection

Companies try to embrace the best policies that support good practices and minimize problems in the work environment, but sometimes conflicts arise from other aspects that are difficult to control: for instance, clashes of personality, or what we sometimes loosely refer to as "bad chemistry." You know how sometimes there are people whom we just find "*antipatiko*," whom we instinctively and for no apparent reason flatly dislike at first meeting? Actually, when we analyze our feelings, we eventually get to the real reasons. Sometimes it's because that person reminds us of someone we had a bad experience with in the past; or it may be that we see the newcomer as an intruder into our territory and hence we feel threatened. It can also be brought about by a misunderstanding of cultural backgrounds and cues.

If you've already approached your Human Resources head and your supervisor and they don't think there's a major problem, then perhaps you are being over-affected by the way this other person does things. Certainly, if they have gone so far as to say you should seek professional help, that's worrisome. Hopefully, the quality of your work hasn't suffered because of this perceived problem. It would be unfortunate if you allowed this to happen.

May I suggest that you spend a little thinking about all these aspects of the situation? Even better, pray about it. While not everything can be solved by reflection, prayer can give us a fresh perspective of our problems, and help us become more open to resolving differences with others.

Options

Consider the following pieces of advice:

Try not to judge everything she does or says. You see, it's quite possible that the new person feels a bit like you do (i.e., that you don't like her); she just has a different way of showing her insecurity.

Try to be happy for her if she is praised. You both work for the same company. You are teammates, not competitors.

Try to concentrate on how to improve your own work, rather than watching what that other person is doing.

CEO mentor Abrera

Why not try to befriend her? The more you know someone, the easier it is to understand his or her quirks and behavior. Her actions may not be aimed at criticizing you; maybe that's the way she is to everyone.

And lastly, try not to indulge in gossip—you may be reacting to other people's interpretations of what was said rather than what was actually meant.

Remind yourself that you are a good employee and that the company values your contribution. They have given you excellent opportunities. Trust that if you continue to just do good work, and think well of others, then no one can bring you down. And you will be "first among the best."

I apologize if I sounded preachy. It just seemed like this was the sort of advice that would help you most right now. God bless.

(*Our CEO columnists can answer requests for career advice through this column. Send your request by postal mail to People at Work Editor, PDI Bldg., Chino Roces Ave., Makati City 1200 or email* peopleatwork@inquirer.com.ph.)

Local dive instructors promote country as diving capital

By Candy G. Villanueva

ALL ABOUT WORK

THE SUN was warm and friendly on their tanned faces. The blueness of the sky rivaled that of the deep salty waters. Rey Guarin inhaled the salty air and plunged in. Teddy Tong put on his diving mask and followed suit. It was the perfect day to dive for the scuba dive instructors. Guarin and Tong are two of the many divers who frequent our beautiful diving spots and coastlines. The duo are also certified scuba dive instructors of the Scuba School International (SSI) headed by Susana May. SSI is also composed of Instructor Certifier, George May, expat Matt Caldwell and long time Anilao resident Carlos Remo.

These divers, like many divers in the country, have one thing in common—passion. Passion for the water and passion for diving. Bound together by their commitment to save and preserve the paradise known as the underwater world, they formed the Anilao Community Divers Incorporated (ACDI); a foundation dedicated in helping build a better infrastructure for Anilao, Batangas.

Diving skills

Scuba dive instructors are certified professionals who teach the fundamentals of diving. They are also well-versed on the human physiology and how it works in underwater pressure. Dive instructors are also trained to teach and administer first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

To earn professional license, a scuba dive instructor must first pass the preliminary course and earn the title of Open Water Diver. After experience and rigorous training, the Open Water Diver earns the title of Divemaster. After about a year, with a minimum of 100 dives, the Divemaster then becomes a certified Dive Instructor. "Anyone with a passion for the sea, who is in fairly good shape, can swim and enjoys teaching can become a Scuba Instructor," says May.

A day in the deep

Before taking the plunge, several preparations are enforced. All the necessary precautions must be adhered to strictly because although nature is beautiful and nurturing, it could also lash back with a vengeance if not respected. Several accidents happen every year because of carelessness. Safety is key, according to May. "Many divers feel that once they are certified they are free to dive to depths they are not trained to do. Keeping divers focused on safety and going back to the fundamentals is vital."

The job does not start in the water. On land, Instructors must fill tanks, clean, fix and prepare equipment, pilot *bangkas* to the perfect dive spots and brief students or divers before they can finally enjoy the water.

Aside from looking out for their charge's safety, instructors also look out for Mother Nature. These instructors make sure that dive spots are left untouched and not violated.

After exploring the dive spots, instructors are tasked with cleanup, disassembly and debriefing. Beyond the call of duty, instructors also provide public service by being available on call to assist with emergencies like air crashes in the water.

Pleasures in the water

Instructors average three dives in a day. The pleasures of the job keep them coming back each day like it was their first dive. Aside from the pristine waters and the boundless treasures of the deep blue, most divers enjoy the tranquility of the waters. When in the water, divers enter a world different from that inhabited by man. Problems are inconsequential once exposed to the brilliant colors and textures of the waterbed.

Instructors also take satisfaction in the fact that their job gives them the opportunity to meet different personalities everyday. But for most like May, they take pride in knowing that their job could help them make a difference not only in their environment but also with the people. "As instructor, I help the local community, through the Anilao Community Divers in Anilao, build a world class infrastructure and help the local youth become professional scuba divers," shares May. "Also, being able to help conserve our natural resources and introduce new divers to the wonderful world of scuba."

Repaying nature

As members of the Anilao Community Divers Incorporated Foundation (ACDI), the SSI instructors work to help the Anilao community through the scuba diving industry. The foundation teaches the local youth scuba diving for free to give them the opportunity to work in local and international resorts. As of date, the foundation has produced five Instructors, two Divemasters and several Open Water Divers. Its goal is to graduate 15 more instructors within the year.

MATT Caldwell (center), instructor and VP of Anilao Community Divers Incorporated (ACDI), flanked by students.

Instructors also participate in the yearly coastal clean up. Last year, ACDI provided equipment for Open Water Divers to clean up underwater garbage and filth. Considering the garbage people accumulate, it wasn't an easy task. "The cleaning is not easy because to avoid damage to the environment, you must maintain your buoyancy while you are picking up the garbage," relates May. "At the same time, the weight of some materials increase your negative buoyancy, which add more weight to carry. In spite of the hard work, these young guys were very happy to volunteer for this program."

Promoting the industry

With the help of the government, instructors hope to make the Philippines a diving capital. "We have some of the best dive spots in Asia and more coastlines than in the USA," says May. "We have more varieties of coral than anyone else and great marine life. We have the natural resources to be the best in Asia."

SUSANA May, scuba dive instructor and head of Scuba School International (SSI)

Instructors wish to promote eco-tourism through diving and therefore expect more support from the government like better road networks going to dive sites, requiring resorts to meet minimum standards for safety and providing buoys to mark diving spots to avoid coral damage. "Scuba diving should be a premier industry in the Philippines," declares May. "It provides jobs in the service industry, where jobs are badly needed, and it's clean. It does not pollute."

CHATROOM

Are personal computer files company property?

LAST Dec. 17, we published the article of Resty S. Odon that raised the question on whether or not personal computer files are company property. Here are some reactions to that article.

In the company of my past employer, what they do is they let the employee sign an agreement that this thing is personal whether it is inside company or not. I guess the only solution for this is that the company provides the employees the rights and let them sign an agreement. That's all! Have a nice day! —**Lexell Garcellano**

After rereading your newspaper article, I bothered to read the others on the page and noticed with some surprise that Bob Rosner made the same point and used similar examples. I'd like to comment on the last point I noticed during my second reading.

If you were to equate ideas = information = data, then ownership of the idea should go to the place it was first realized. If that means you generated the idea during work time and/or on work computers (most likely using work-related recourses or business models), then the idea should belong to the employer. As long as you are part of an organization your input belongs to the organization regardless of your idea's relevance.

Your last question: Can a company ...? The answer is YES. Safety and security are imperative; as such, data crime and loss/integrity should be at the forefront of consideration. Another YES should be said since business already does so and assuming otherwise simply displays a lack of awareness on the part of the employee (it is done for legal protection, data backups, data history research, performance analysis on the part of the company as well as employees. These are blanket type searches/backups that would include any residual data you might have thought private). It would also indicate a lack of judgment of the company and poor business practice if they didn't.

If we ask: Should a company ...? I'd have to say no, Business Ethics is a first year college subject often forgotten. Should a company ...? With the intention to benefit, should again be answered with a resounding NO, but there is no protection against this since anyone can easily copy and remove your personal information from the workplace; here, we need control and supervision for the employees.

Just like a public warning or beeping in the background indicates the recording of business phone calls so public disclaimers should warn employees of the monitoring of computer networks.

Use vs. abuse for employees as well as supervision vs. abuse should be well defined and clearly stated to all people affected. —**Michael Spliedt, Computer Forensic Analyst, FailSafe Philippines**

(*We invite you to enter the People at Work Chatroom. You can send your comments on any of the articles published in the Wednesday and Sunday editions of People at Work or reply to any of the letters sent by readers to* peopleatwork@inquirer.com.ph.)

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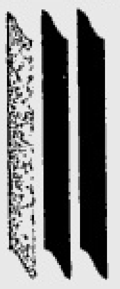

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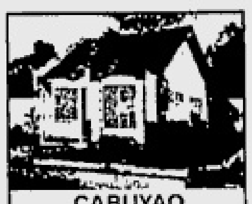

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Wanted: ACCOUNTING CLERK. Submit resume at ULANDAY CONTRACTORS INC., U-443 Cityland Pasong Tamo Tower Don Chino Roces Ave. Pio del Pilar Makati Must be graduate in BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COMMERCE

Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme
Balay Y Ang Banua, Sports Complex Road, Sta. Monica Heights,
Puerto Princesa City, 5300 , Palawan ☎(048) 434-4235

For Immediate Hiring

The Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme (PTFPP) a special project of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff (PCSDS) funded by a grant from the European Union is in need of **SPECIALISTS** to extend operational support in the implementation of activities set out in AWP, CY9

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST (1)

- With Consultancy experience in local governance and institutional development.
- Wide experience working with LGU and familiar with Local Government Code
- Will be based in Puerto Princesa City with travels to Northern and Southern part of Palawan

RESOURCE ECONOMIST (1)

- Has a strong background in assessing economic development and opportunities for rural/local communities
- Keen in formulating business plans/funding mechanisms
- Familiar with GIS and Media Center facilities and operations

ATTRACTIVE COMPENSATION PACKAGE AWAITS QUALIFIED APPLICANTS.

Interested applicants are requested to submit their intention and comprehensive resumé addressed to the PTFPP Co-Directors not later than Jan 16, 2004 or e-mail at ptfpp@mozcom.com

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PUBLIC NOTICES

ANNOUNCEMENT

CAREGIVER TRAINING 5271590

AUCTION SALE

NATION Pawnshop, Inc Pob., Meyc Bulacan will auction unredeemed pledges of July '03 on Jan. 2, '04. 10am. - *Lanuza & Sons-Auctioneer.*

LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the estate of the late BASILIO CABRERA has been extrajudicially settled by his heirs per Doc. No. 110; Page No. 22; Book No. XXXI; Series of 2003, before Notary Public Atty. Angel R. Gonzales PTR No. 7156704, Pasay City
PDI-January 7, 14 & 21, 2004

PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF LOSS

Notice is hereby given that the DANGEROUS DRUG S-2 ID License# 11240R020951 of Dra. Ma. Cynthia B. Sanchez was lost.
(PDI- Dec 31 2003, Jan. 07 & 14. 2004)

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY
Quezon City

ERRATUM ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF BIDDING

The National Food Authority (NFA) wishes to announce the following amendments with reference to the announcement issued last 12 January 2004 on the importation of Maximum 500,000 MT, 10% MOLSO long grain white rice:

1. Volume to be offered:

	From	To
April, 2004	at least 25% / balance	at least another 25% / balance
May, 2004	at least 25% / balance	at least another 25% balance

2. Paragraph 4, line 2
Deletion of the word "quantity"

(Sgd.) GREGORIO Y. TAN, JR.
Chairman, BAC and Deputy Administrator

DBP Development Bank of the Philippines

INVITATION FOR NEGOTIATED OFFER

The Development Bank of the Philippines will entertain offers on a First-Come, First-Served basis at the Asset Management Department, 2nd Floor, DBP Head Office, Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City for the following properties:

CODE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	MINIMUM SELLING PRICE
REAL ESTATE			
MANILA			
AMD-ML-102	No. 100 Industry Road II cor. Reparo Rd., Araneta University Village, Malabon	2,380 m2 industrial lot (TCT No. M-21827) w/ building & improvements	P 31,861,300.00
PF-GST-01	Lot 26 Blk. 1, Quezon's Place, Teoville West, San Dionisio, Parañaque	321 m2 residential lot (TCT No. T-150452)	P 1,605,000.00
CAVITE			
PF-GST-02	Lot 7 Blk. 4, Family Village, Panapaan, Bacoor	240 m2 residential lot (TCT No. T-267251)	P 720,000.00
NUEVA ECIJA			
CWB-2	Marawara, Jaen	1,000 m2 interior residential lot (TCT No. NT-286889) with building and improvements	P 276,000.00
CHATTELS (Sale on "as is, where is" basis)			
AMD-ML-57c	Serg's Products, Inc. Compound, Ortigas Avenue, Cainta, Rizal	Scrap equipment consisting of various electric motors, compressors welding machines & other items approximately at 10,100 kgs.	P 62,500.00

Forms for negotiated offers may be obtained from AMD-Acquired Assets.

For inquiries, please call telephone numbers:
892-1566/893-7172 or 818-9511 loc. 2218/2252 for Code starting with AMD and PF; and 926-1686 or 818-9511 loc. 1411 for CWB.

ASSET MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

(PDI - Jan. 14, 2004)

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☎ 8114361 ☎ 8114370 ☎ 8114012 Fax 8925578
ST. ANTHONY'S BLDG., AURORA BLVD., QUEZON CITY
☎ 912-9008-11 Fax 912-9011
SM MEGAMALL, MANDALUYONG CITY
☎ 6350219 ☎ 6872354 ☎ 6872366 Fax 6350220
G/F TRINITY BLDG., 636 T.M. KALAW ST., ERMITA, MANILA
☎ 5273342 ☎ 5280183 ☎ 5276357 Fax 5280213
ALABANG, MUNTINLUPA CITY
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e-mail address: main_classifieds@inquirer.com.ph

OBITUARIES

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Mortuary and Crematory opening 1st quarter 2004!

"For
God so
loved the
world,
that He
gave us
His only
begotten
Son, that
whoever
believes
in Him
shall not
perish but
have
everlasting
life." – John 3:16

For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

ENGR. FORTUNATO N. DIZON

of #8 Tagumpay St., Sindalan,
San Fernando City, Pampanga
August 28, 1955 - January 12, 2004

Peacefully joined his Creator on
January 12, 2004 at the age of 48.

Loving husband to Leticia
Loving father to: Joseph Carlo,
James Allan,
Denise Ysabel and
Gian Vincent

His body lies in state at the Sindalan Chapel, San Fernando City, Pampanga.

Interment will be on Thursday, January 15, 2004, at 3:00 o'clock PM at Calulut, Memorial Garden, San Fernando City, Pampanga.

"Time is not measured by the years that you live, but by the deeds that you do and the joy that you give... So what does it matter how long we may live, if as long as we live, we unselfishly give."
(Helen Steiner Rice)

CAMILO BACANI SALVADOR

Peacefully joined our Lord
on January 09, 2004 at the age of 89.

His body lies in state at Chapel B,
Funeraria Paz, Araneta and will be
transferred in Sta. Cruz, Tarlac, Tarlac.

Interment date will be on January 18, 2004
at 8:30 a.m. at Eternal Garden, Tarlac.

"...absent with the
body to be present
with the Lord."
2 Corinthians 5:8

COL. HOSPICIO BONDOC TUAZON (Ret.)

"Piciong" of Magalang, Pampanga
May 21, 1916 – January 12, 2004

PMA CLASS 1940
Defender of Bataan & Corregidor
Death March Survivor
Exec. Officer, 20th BCT PEFTOK
First Chief, Criminal Investigation Services (CIS)
Former Area Commander, AFP Visayas
Founder, AISA
Board Member, PVAO Military Service Board
Board Member, Mindanao Port Authority

and husband of the late **LOURDES AQUINO HENSON**

His bereaved children & grandchildren
Reg & Tess Flores – Ron & Ryan
Luz & Toti Tanchoco – Mitch, Cucci, Koko & RG
Ludy & Paul Harbaugh
Linda

relatives & friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at Nacional Memorial Homes, Chapel 2-B, G. Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

He will be laid to rest at the Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City, on Saturday, January 17, 2004, after the 9:00 a.m. Mass at the Camp Crame Chapel.

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PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

NOTICE TO DEPOSITORS OF THE CLOSED RURAL BANK OF STO. DOMINGO (ALBAY), INC.

1. Starting January 15, 2004, the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) thru its duly authorized representatives shall receive claims for insured deposits maintained with the closed Rural Bank of Sto. Domingo (Albay), Inc.
2. Depositors are requested to proceed directly to the premises of the said closed bank from January 15 to February 5, 2004, to file claims for insured deposits.

   PDIC representatives are stationed at the premises of the closed bank on the above cited dates to accept claims and entertain queries of depositors during office hours, Monday to Friday.

   After the said dates, all depositors can file their claims personally at the PDIC Office from Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., or by mail addressed to-

   The Manager
   Claims Processing Department
   Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation
   2228 Chino Roces Avenue
   1231 Makati City
3. Depositors are advised to present the following requirements to the PDIC representatives when filing their claims:
   a. Original evidence of deposit such as Savings Passbook and/or Certificate of Time Deposits.
   b. Latest identification documents (ID) bearing the depositor's signature.

   Other documents maybe required by the PDIC representatives in the course of their processing of claims filed.
4. Pursuant to the provision of R.A. 3591, as amended, the prescriptive date (last day) for filing of claims for insured deposits in the closed Rural Bank of Sto. Domingo (Albay), Inc. is on **July 02, 2005**. After **July 02, 2005**, PDIC as insurer, shall no longer accept any claim for insured deposits maintained with the said closed bank.

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

(PDI--Jan. 14 & 15, 2004)

We are in need of

ENCODER

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626 G. Araneta Ave., Q.C.
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MAYNILAD WATER SERVICES, INC.
Basement, MWSI Bldg., MWSS Complex
Katipunan Road, Balara, Quezon City, Philippines 1100

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Interested parties may call Ms. Melissa Valencia of Customer Service at telephone no. 435-3577 or visit our Customer Service office at Basement, MWSI Offices, MWSS Bldg., Katipunan Road, Balara, Quezon City.

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
Republic of the Philippines
Department of Labor & Employment
POEA Bldg., Ortigas Avenue, Cor. EDSA, Mandaluyong City 1501
P.O. Box 175 Greenhills, San Juan, Metro Manila
Tel. 7221144 • 7221155 • E-mail info@poea.gov.ph
Website www.poea.gov.ph

GOVERNING BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 11
Series of 2003

WHEREAS, Section 1, Rule 1, Part V of the POEA Rules and Regulations Governing the Recruitment and Employment of Landbased Overseas Workers provides that the Administration shall determine, formulate and review employment standards in accordance with the market development thrust and welfare objectives of the overseas employment program and the prevailing market conditions;

WHEREAS, under the present system, Overseas Filipino Workers are limited to a self insurance scheme where the OFWs are provided life and accident insurance coverage as part of the package of benefits from their contribution to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA);

WHEREAS, there is an increasing demand for professional, skilled and semi-skilled Filipino workers to Iraq;

WHEREAS, despite the current situation in Iraq, Filipino workers have manifested their desire to be deployed to Iraq;

WHEREAS, the POEA sees the need to provide better protection to Filipino workers employed therein, through additional life and accident insurance coverage in the amount of P200,000, on top of the regular insurance coverage provided by the OWWA;

NOW, THEREFORE, the POEA Governing Board, in a meeting duly convened hereby resolves to adopt a policy requiring all employers/principals of Iraq-bound Filipino workers to provide life and accident insurance in the amount of two hundred thousand (P200,000) at no cost to the workers.

The POEA shall issue the appropriate implementing guidelines to implement the Resolution. The Guidelines shall take effect fifteen (15) days after publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

The POEA is further directed to conduct an immediate review of the adequacy of the insurance coverage comparable to those provided by other labor sending countries to Iraq and submit its recommendation to the Governing Board for approval.

Done in Metro Manila, this 23rd of December 2003.

(Sgd.) **DANILO P. CRUZ**
Undersecretary of Labor and Employment
and Designated Chairman of the Governing Board

(Sgd.) **GREGORIO S. OCA**
Member

(Sgd.) **ALEXIS P. CRUEL**
Member

(Sgd.) **ISIDRO Q. ALIGADA**
Member

(Sgd.) **GUILLERMINA T. GABOR**
Member

(Sgd.) **ROSALINDA DIMAPILIS-BALDOZ**
Member

(PDI–January 14, 2004)

BCDA

BASES CONVERSION DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS
ASSET DISPOSITION PROGRAM – PHASE 2

The Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) is inviting interested proponents to participate in Phase 2 of BCDA's Asset Disposition Program (ADP Phase 2). ADP Phase 2 involves the development and privatization of the following properties:

1. Approximately 7,659-square meter LogCom, Firing Range located along C-5 Road, Taguig, Metro Manila; and
2. Approximately 5,025-square meter Nichols Loop (Lot 10) located along South Superhighway, Villamor Air Base (VAB), Pasay City.

Interested proponents may submit their Letters of Interest to BCDA and can purchase the Terms of Reference (TOR) for ADP Phase 2 that outlines, among others, the requirements that will enable proponents to participate in the privatization.

The TOR for ADP Phase 2 will be ready for distribution to interested proponents starting on 14 January 2004 at the BCDA offices. A non-refundable cost of the TOR is Php10,000.00, for each TOR, payable to the BCDA in Cash or Manager's Check.

A conference among interested proponents is tentatively set on 23 January 2004. The objective of the conference is to discuss the property that form part of ADP Phase 2, the TOR and other clarifications from interested proponents. Interested proponents will be informed of the final schedule and venue of the conference through contact numbers submitted to the BCDA.

Interested proponents can direct their inquiries to:

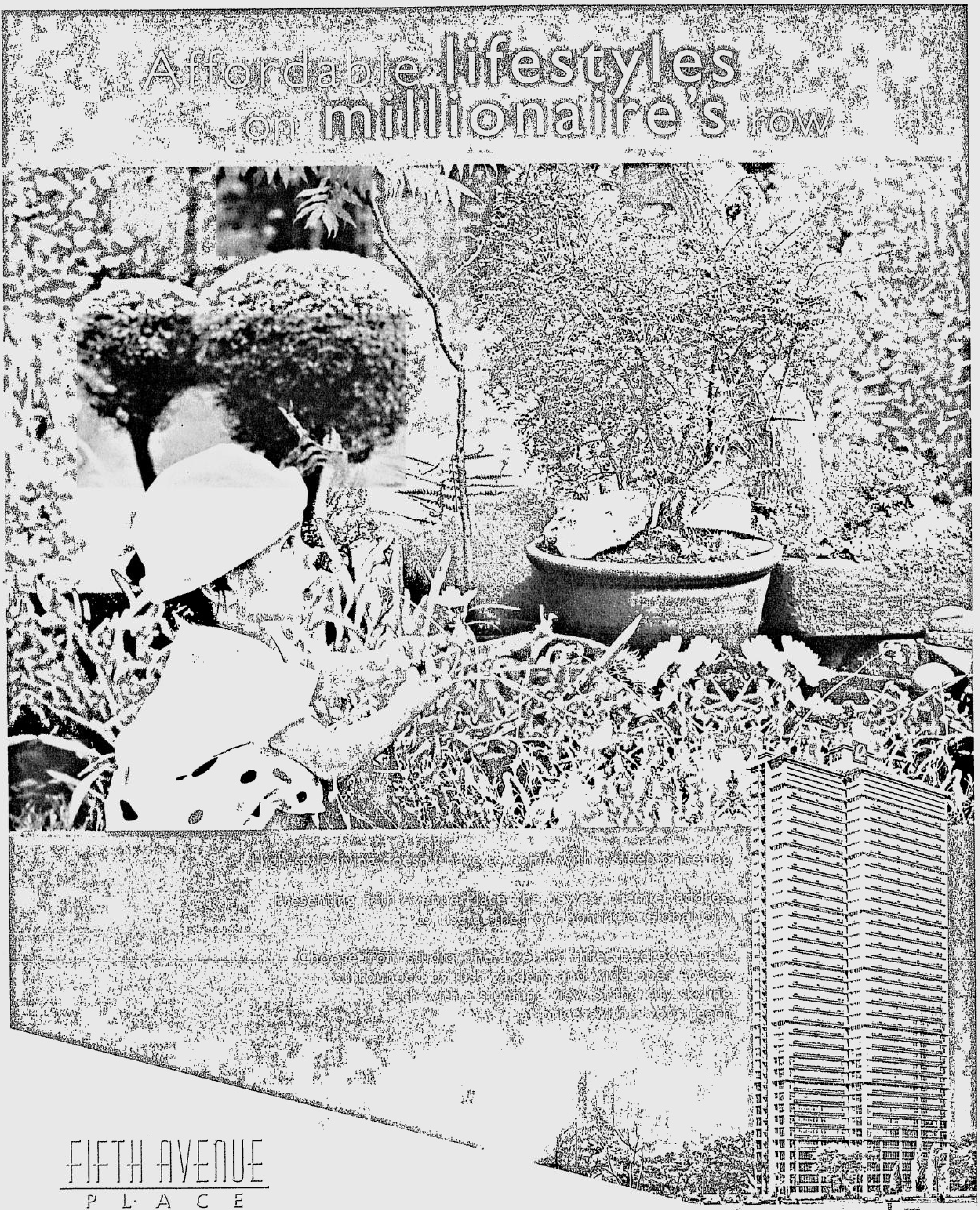
THE CHAIRMAN
ADP PHASE 2 COMMITTEE (ADPCom-2)
BCDA Corporate Centre
Gozar cor. Lucas Street, Villamor Air Base
Pasay City

or they can contact Ms. Aileen R. Zosa or Ms. Bambie L. Andal at telephone numbers 510-0420 or 510-0411.

RUFO COLAYCO
President and Chief Executive Officer

(PDI–Jan. 14, 16 & 21, 2004)

FIFTH AVENUE PLACE



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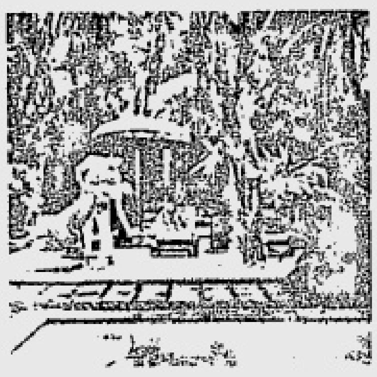

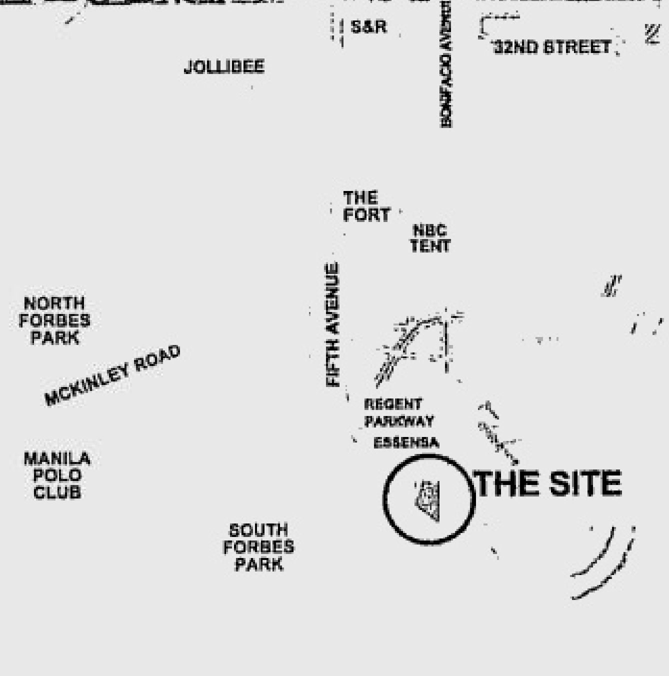
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LIFESTYLE

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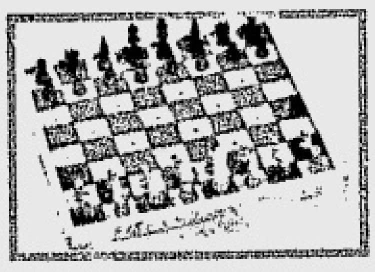
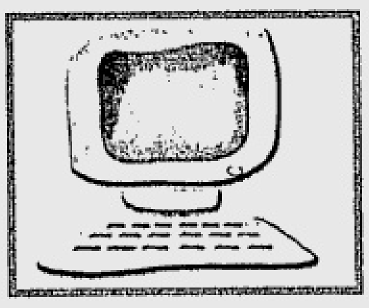
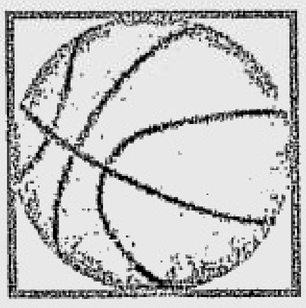
Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**
Chief of Correspondents **Pam Pastor**



Fast forward Part 2

This week, we took another look at our crystal ball to reveal what 2004 has in store for us in sports, technology and personalities. We also have an interview with stuntmaster Lauro Chartrand and a report on how much young people have been spending on their mobile phones. Read on

Which personalities will make waves in 2004?

By Pam Pastor

WE asked you to look into your own crystal balls. Here's what you said:

The Neptunes, Eminem will produce more songs that will top the charts. Ali G will make it big this year if he makes a film, Ai Ai De Las Alas will make another blockbuster comedy with director Wenn Deramas, and Rico and Fran of Monster Radio RX 93.1 will be big. Hehehe.—**Rico Robles, 21**

Politicians will do everything to make waves.—**Rikka, 36**

6 Cycle Mind, Joseph Yeo, Kyla and Nina.—**Lally, 23**

So far, Britney's off to a good start already.—**Rosa, 26**

FPJ.—**Daryl**

Drew Arellano because of his good looks and even greater talent to host and act, Sarah Geronimo and Erik Santos because they represent the new generation of singers, Mark Meilly because of his good film ("Crying Ladies") and he looks very promising, Maxene Magalona because she just keeps getting prettier by the minute, Juddah Paolo and JC De Vera because they have that classic matinee idol personas. For the more established ones, Piolo Pascual because I like the mystery he exudes plus the fact that he's a brilliant actor, Cheese because they're still creating so much more excitement in anticipation of their next album, Parokya ni Edgar because they never fail to surprise me, Ai Ai De Las Alas because she has two exciting movie projects on the way, Victor Neri because we're finally noticing that he's a good actor, John Prats because he's still cute, Regine V because she still remains to be an icon for many gays. Foreign? Tom Cruise because of the buzz created by "The Last Samurai," Britney Spears because—and many people will raise their arms in protest—she might indeed be the next Madonna, Nicole Kidman and Renee Zelwegger because of "Cold Mountain" and Daniel Radcliffe because he looks so handsome in the new "Harry Potter" movie.—**Jet Valle, ageless!**

Kris Aquino never fails. I think she tops even Madonna and Britney Spears in doing anything to get attention.—**Qpid, (10+5*2)+3*6/2**

Jennifer Garner, of course!—**Alan**

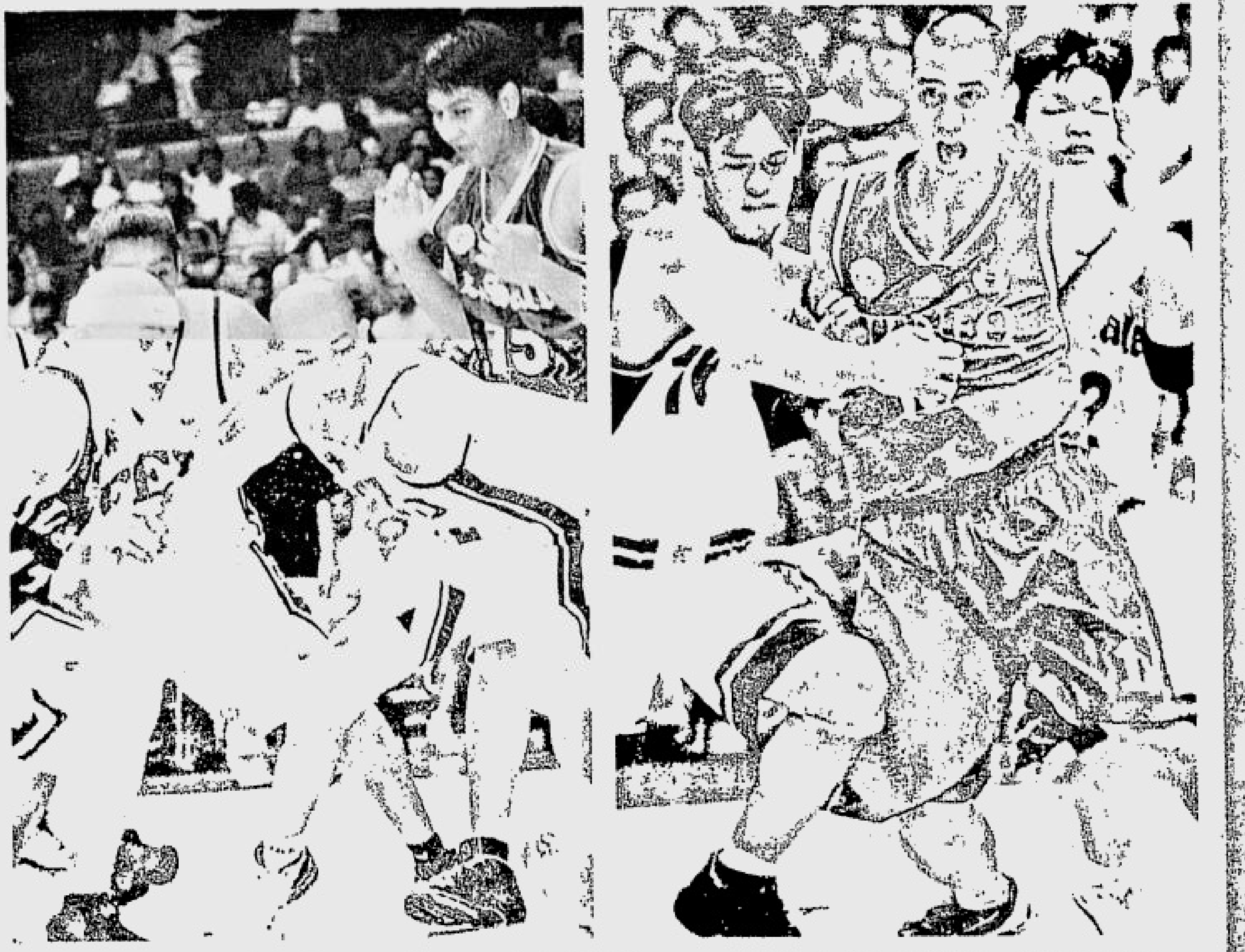
Nina will continue to shine, Christian Bautista of "Star In A Million" will be big very soon, and also Arstrong.—**Anne Poblador**

The Akafellas!—**Franco Mabanta**

"P. Diddy and J.Lo. They'll be back in each other's arms. Believe."—**Alex Estoesta, 23**

I think Raul Roco will make waves and shine as the alternative to the major political parties.—**Jaemark, 22**

Mahal and Mura. Hahaha.—**Dominic Ochoa, 18 years old, hahaha**



FAST AND FURIOUS. That's the name of the game in the UAAP cage wars. (Right photo) La Salle's Jerwin Gaco and JR Aquino try to prevent Ateneo's Rich Alvarez from getting the elusive leather during last year's season. (Left photo) Mark Isip of champion FEU Tamaraws finds the traffic heavy against La Salle's Mac Cardona (left) and Mark Benitez.

A more exciting year in sports coming

By Dennis U. Eroa

FORGET about the appetizers—here's the main course for sporting year 2004.

Ateneo and La Salle, the country's bitterest rivals in collegiate basketball, will make a grand comeback which will be heard round the hoop world.

Relegated to the sidelines by a band of hungry Tamaraws, the Blue Eagles and the Green Archers are going to engage each other in a don't-take-prisoners scenario for the third time in four years.

La Salle rode high on the hot hands of Ren Ren Ritualo and Mike Cortez to beat Ateneo in 2001 at the Big Dome.

But a year later, Ateneo, powered by the strong inside moves of Enrico Villanueva and Rich Alvarez, repaid the compliments.

To the sadness of both their fans, not to mention the hordes of scalpers, FEU gatecrashed what could have been the biggest showdown in the year that past.

Not to worry, this year should mark the "Return of the Comeback," as one basketball observer called it.

FEU, thanks to Koy Banal's Phil Jackson-like demeanor, and dribblers Arwind Santos and Dennis Miranda, remain deadly. Ditto with Adamson, which is still trying for the nth time to bury its countless disappointments.

La Salle and Ateneo, however, possess something which should make the main course mouthwatering.

Known for their commitment to excellence, the Archers and the Eagles simply dislike each other on and off the court.

That's the apt description: dislike.

And this should make the "Return of the Comeback" a reality in the Year of the Monkey.

Now for the appetizers.

Little brother

The title race in the NCAA wars, UAAP's little brother in terms of popularity, is going to be wide open.

The Knights of Letran, thanks to Louie Alas' handling, are on target for a second straight title with the Stags and perhaps the Red Lions as their chief challengers.

> The year before the country hosts the 2005 SEA Games should be a buildup to, not the lull before, the storm

Jose Rizal University remains a puzzle as it continues to fall short of saying "Mi Ultimo Adios" to its ending decades of suffering.

Despite the claims of many, basketball will remain the country's favorite pastime, routing "texting," which is also called the "fastest finger."

This is the reason for the mushrooming of various alphabet basketball leagues, which isn't really helping our repeated attempts to topple Yao Ming and company from their pedestal.

The PBA, no doubt, envies the PBA last year. [In the former] I am referring to the Philippine Basketball Association, which was hard-hit by scandals; [and the latter,] the Philippine Badminton Association under a scholarly former First Lady, which enjoyed tremendous popularity.

I see a more peaceful league, although questions on alleged "Fil-shams" and game-fixing will continue to hound Asia's first pay-for-play league.

The PBL is steady as ever, but it will continue to suffer from lack of attendance even if it has opened its gates for free. By linking up with the schools, the PBL is off to the right direction.

Storm coming

After a lull in "fighting," expect another wave of assault from the Nic Jorge-led Basketball Association of the Philippines Inc. Bapi isn't going to stop until the BAP leaders headed by Tiny Literal, Christian Tan and Graham Lim, are blasted into orbit.

In such a case, talks of a basketball summit, concerted development program, etc.. from our so-called sporting leaders are all empty.

If Bapi and BAP will resume their battle of attrition, I also see no respite in the Philippine Olympic Committee-Philippine Sports Commission turf war. This will stymie our bid to do a Vietnam in the 2005 SEA Games to be hosted by the Philippines.

Thanks to taekwondo, bowling, athletics, fencing, wushu, swimming, diving and boxing, there's glimmer of hope for the Philippines in the SEA Games level.

Forget about volleyball, badminton, shooting, football and lawn tennis, whose players are totally lacking in height, power, charisma and technique (remember Felix Abarrientos, Beeyong Sison, Roland So and Raymund Suarez?) when ranged against the Paradorns of Thailand.

Grandmaster-to-be Mark Paragua will rule chess at the expense of the veterans such as Eugene Torre and Joey Antonio, while gymnastics is going to achieve new heights thanks to American-based and rings expert Neil Faustino, whose drive for excellence is rivaled only by his appetite for *adobo* and *pancit*.

X-Games

Mixed martial arts, Xtreme Games, mountain and wall climbing, duathlon, cycling, triathlon, running, cross country races, car and go-kart racing, motocross—they will gain the spotlight.

Despite the proliferation of "fakes," the Made in China originals (Nike, Adidas) will continue to be the preferred wear by enthusiasts who know the thin line separating success and injury.

Sports will continue to be technology-driven, but the recipe for success continues to be old-fasioned: hard work.

Beach volleyball, thanks to Nestlé

A MORE/ C4

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LOGO LOVE 2
LOGO OTSO 3
LOGO YRMONKEY 4
LOGO FRENCH 5
LOGO TRIBAL1 6
LOGO SCORPIONS 7
LOGO SEXYBACK 8
LOGO DREAMLUV 9
LOGO NEWYRKISS 10
LOGO ROSEHARTS 11
LOGO SEXYLADY 12
LOGO HARTANGEL 13
LOGO FIREWORKS1 14
LOGO KISS4U1 15
LOGO CRAZYLOVE 16
LOGO SEXYBABY 17
LOGO CUTEBER 18
LOGO DOLP 19
LOGO FLOWLOVE 20

1 Spaghetti Song *Sexbomb* **TONE SPAG**
2 Forever's Not Enough *Sarah Geronimo* **TONE 4EVERSNOT**
3 Mr. Suave *Parokya Ni Edgar* **TONE MRSUAVE**
4 Maybe *Enrique Iglesias* **TONE MAYBE**
5 Elesi *Rivermaya* **TONE ELESI**
6 Where Is The Love *Black Eyed Peas* **TONE WERISLUV**
7 Happy *Rolling Stones* **TONE HAPPY**
8 I'll Be *Edwin McCain* **TONE IBE**
9 Unwell *Matchbox 20* **TONE UNWELL**
10 I'm Lovin' It *Justin Timberlake* **TONE IMLOVINH**
11 Kanlungan *Noel Cabangon* **TONE KANLUNGAN**
12 Perfect *True Faith* **TONE PERFECT**
13 Asereje *Los Ketchup* **TONE ASEREJE**
14 Life For Rent *Dido* **TONE LIFEFOR**
15 Broken Vow *Lara Fabian* **TONE BROKEN**
16 Since I Told You It's Over *Stereophonics* **TONE SINCEI**
17 Hey Whatever *Westlife* **TONE HEYWHAT**
18 Moon Shadow *Mandy Moore* **TONE MSHADOW**
19 The Sun Always Shines On TV *AHA* **TONE SUNTV**
20 Clarity *John Mayer* **TONE CLARITY**

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SMART
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New Year, final opportunity at The Columns, Ayala Avenue

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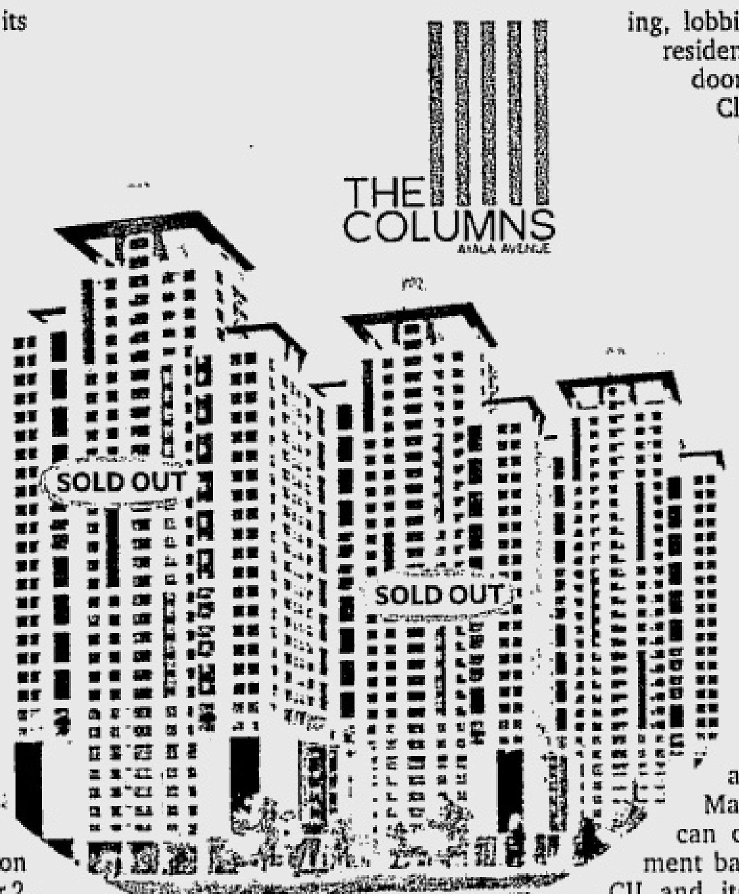

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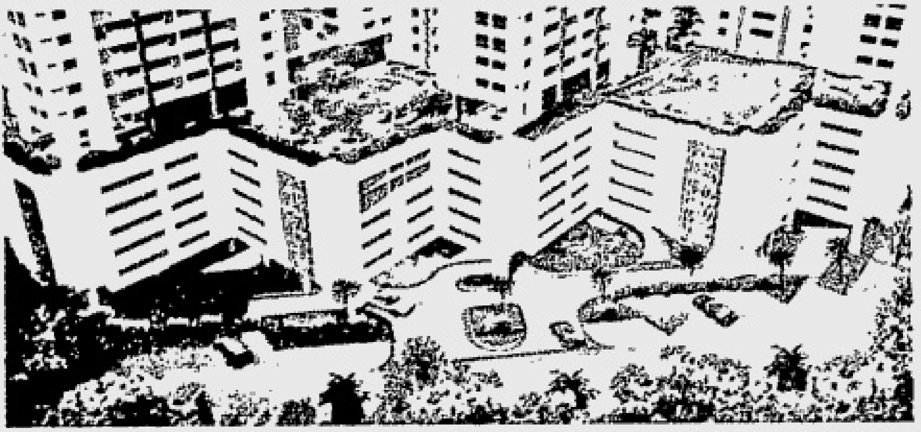
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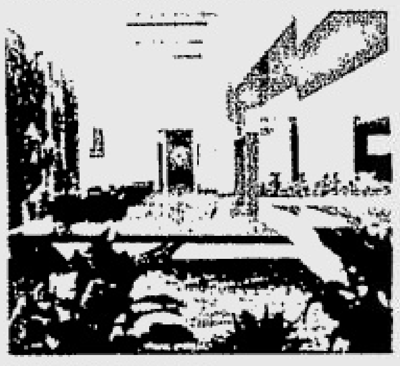
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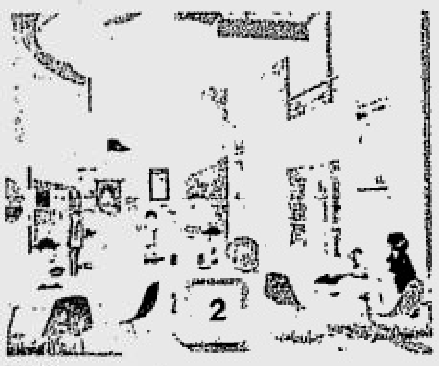
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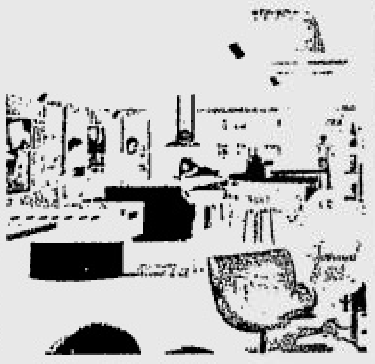
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Balce, like the other happy buyers, is pleased by the integrated Residential Club amenities, noting that its "thorough design enhances condo living." He loves the idea of both a gym and a day care center just an elevator ride away, and is keen on combining a sense of community with soothing privacy. Needless to say, the location and name recognition are big factors in his choice. "At Ayala, you're practically in the heart of a vibrant and world-class city," he enthuses.

SHIRLEY E. OLAYA sees The Columns as a prime investment opportunity that's within reach of herself and her family. "We are not millionaires with hundreds of thousands of dollars to spend. For an affordable price, about $80,000, we can own a good investment property in a prime location. The payment terms are also attractive for investors with limited budget."

As an investor, she feels reassured that The Columns comes from Community Innovations, Inc., an Ayala Land company. "Having the Ayala name, gives me peace of mind that this project is a good investment," she says. "The fact that it is affiliated with Ayala-a name that connotes strength and stability [allows me to expect] the project to be completed and delivered as promised and when promised."

SHIRLEY Olaya and daughter

The Columns' Recreational Club combines amenities into a community-building resort-like experience. Olaya approves of the feeling of community. "Definitely, it would be wholesome living if you know your neighbors and you have a chance to mingle with them on weekends, such as on Sunday barbecues and pool parties." Overall she says of the amenities, "Convenience is the key word. I like the entertainment place for kids and guests, and the transient rooms that can be used by guests as well."

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Community Innovations, Inc. Offers Special Pricing Plan as low as

P13,000/month

Community Innovations Inc. (CII) offers a special payment scheme for The Columns, Ayala Avenue with the launch of the final and ultimate tower of the project, Tower 3.

This promotion began as a commemoration of the success of The Columns, Ayala Avenue, which passed the half-way mark in sales in just eight months. Tower One of the three-tower complex sold out in four months.

In time for the launch of Tower 3, buyers who wish to seize the opportunity to enter into the good life at The Columns, Ayala Avenue can avail of special Zero Down-payment schemes, with monthly payments as low as P13,000.

This zero-down payment scheme is designed to complement The Columns' already affordable standard payment schemes, which make The Columns' enviable mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units within reach of young urban achievers and their families.

Payment schemes can be customized to suit the needs and abilities of individual buyers, part of CII's commitment to creating and nurturing true communities in its developments.

The Columns, Ayala Avenue is the answer to the dreams of young urban achievers seeking a quality condominium residence within the Makati CBD. Sporting three 30 story towers and a uniquely integrated show-stopping Recreational Club, The Columns, Ayala Avenue is one of the most talked-about properties in town.

Community Innovations, Inc. is dedicated to providing carefully-planned and meticulously-designed communities. An Ayala Land company, CII backs its bold mission with the experience and reputation of Ayala Land as the country's leading developer.

Designers of The Columns, Ayala Avenue have described the emerging community as "a vertical village." The Recreational Club of The Columns, Ayala Avenue is more than a conglomeration of amenities. It provides areas for the health and well-being of residents, in privacy and in community.

The Recreational Club provides features that are the equivalent of those in a country club or posh recreational center. For the cost of a studio, a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom, the owners of The Columns, Ayala Avenue units gain a major plus that is the equivalent of a club membership.

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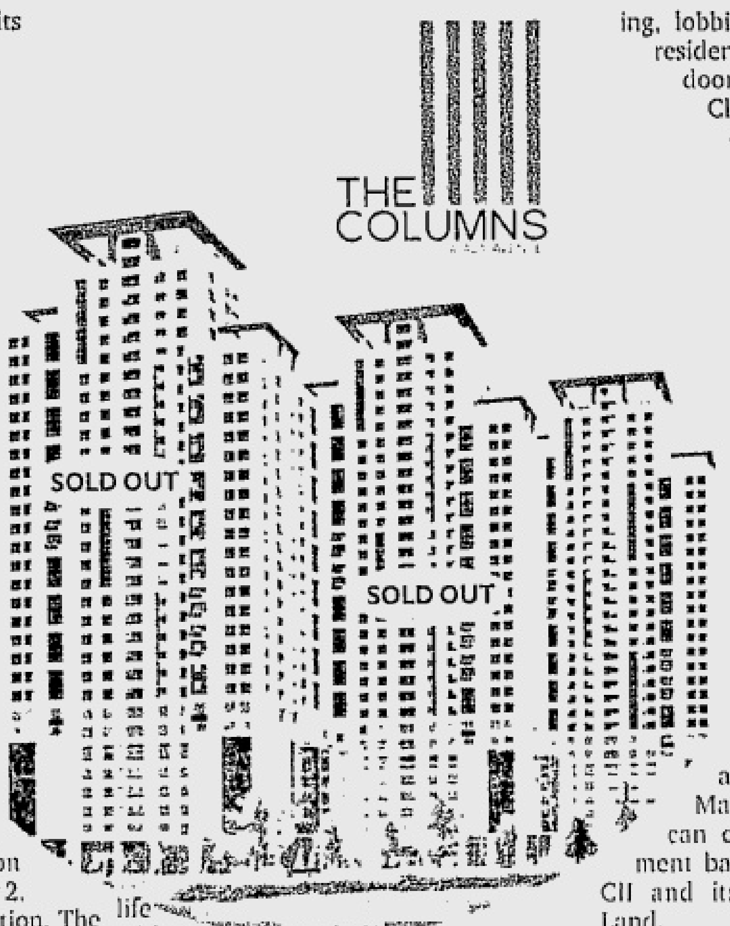

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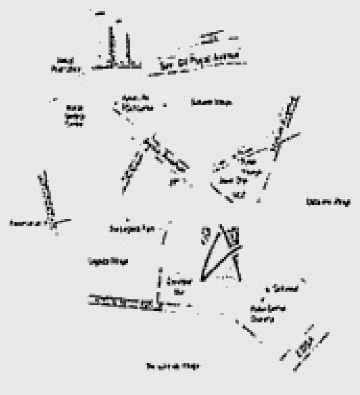

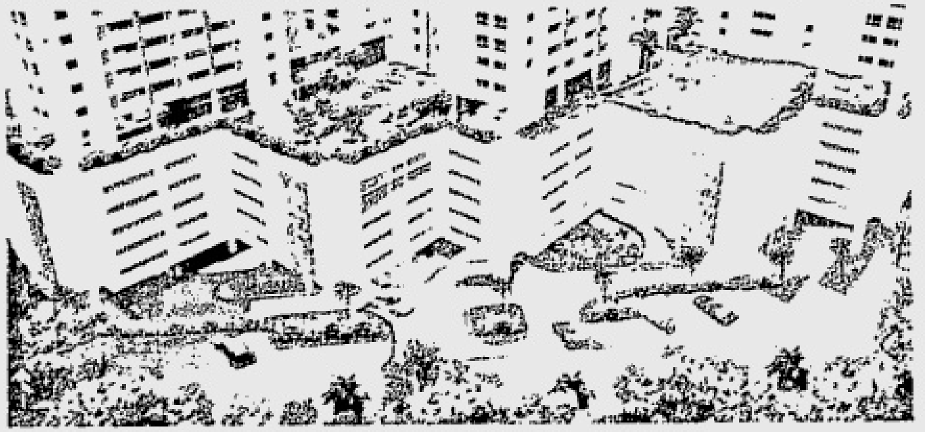
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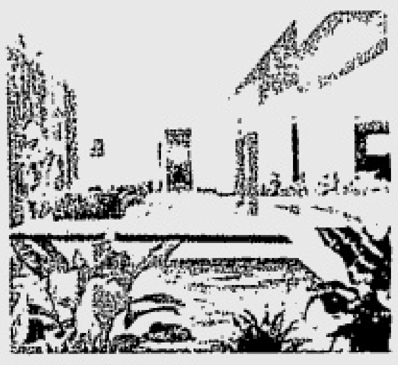
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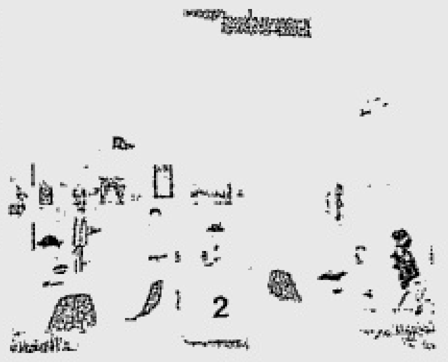
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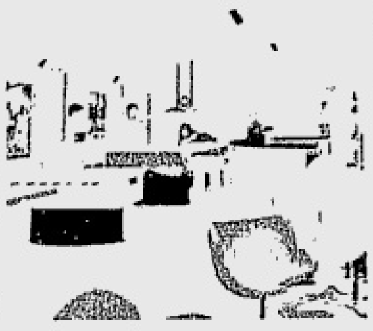
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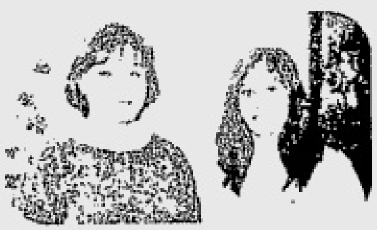
"It's a nice fit," he says. "For someone who is a frequent traveler, location and convenience are the keywords."

The model units helped him make his decision. "The model units are cool and make good use of space planning," he says. "And the design creates a strong visual statement."

Balce, like the other happy buyers, is pleased by the integrated Residential Club amenities, noting that its "thorough design enhances condo living." He loves the idea of both a gym and a day care center just an elevator ride away, and is keen on combining a sense of community with soothing privacy. Needless to say, the location and name recognition are big factors in his choice. "At Ayala, you're practically in the heart of a vibrant and world-class city," he enthuses.

SHIRLEY E. OLAYA sees The Columns as a prime investment opportunity that's within reach of herself and her family. "We are not millionaires with hundreds of thousands of dollars to spend. For an affordable price, about $80,000, we can own a good investment property in a prime location. The payment terms are also attractive for investors with limited budget."

As an investor, she feels reassured that The Columns comes from Community Innovations, Inc., an Ayala Land company. "Having the Ayala name, gives me peace of mind that this project is a good investment," she says. "The fact that it is affiliated with Ayala-a name that connotes strength and stability [allows me to expect] the project to be completed and delivered as promised and when promised."


SHIRLEY Olaya and daughter

The Columns' Recreational Club combines amenities into a community-building resort-like experience. Olaya approves of the feeling of community. "Definitely, it would be wholesome living if you know your neighbors and you have a chance to mingle with them on weekends, such as on Sunday barbecues and pool parties." Overall she says of the amenities, "Convenience is the key word. I like the entertainment place for kids and guests, and the transient rooms that can be used by guests as well."

For inquiries, please call 750-0471 or 750-0484, email at cii-sales@ayalaland.com.ph or visit www.communityinnovations.com.ph. Model units available for viewing at the 3rd Floor Glorietta 3.

Community Innovations, Inc. Offers Special Pricing Plan as low as

[illegible]

Community Innovations Inc. (CII) offers a special payment scheme for The Columns, Ayala Avenue with the launch of the final and ultimate tower of the project, Tower 3.

This promotion began as a commemoration of the success of The Columns, Ayala Avenue, which passed the half-way mark in sales in just eight months. Tower One of the three-tower complex sold out in four months.

In time for the launch of Tower 3, buyers who wish to seize the opportunity to enter into the good life at The Columns, Ayala Avenue can avail of special Zero Down-payment schemes, with monthly payments as low as P13,000.

This zero-down payment scheme is designed to complement The Columns' already affordable standard payment schemes, which make The Columns' enviable mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units within reach of young urban achievers and their families.

Payment schemes can be customized to suit the needs and abilities of individual buyers, part of CII's commitment to creating and nurturing true communities in its developments.

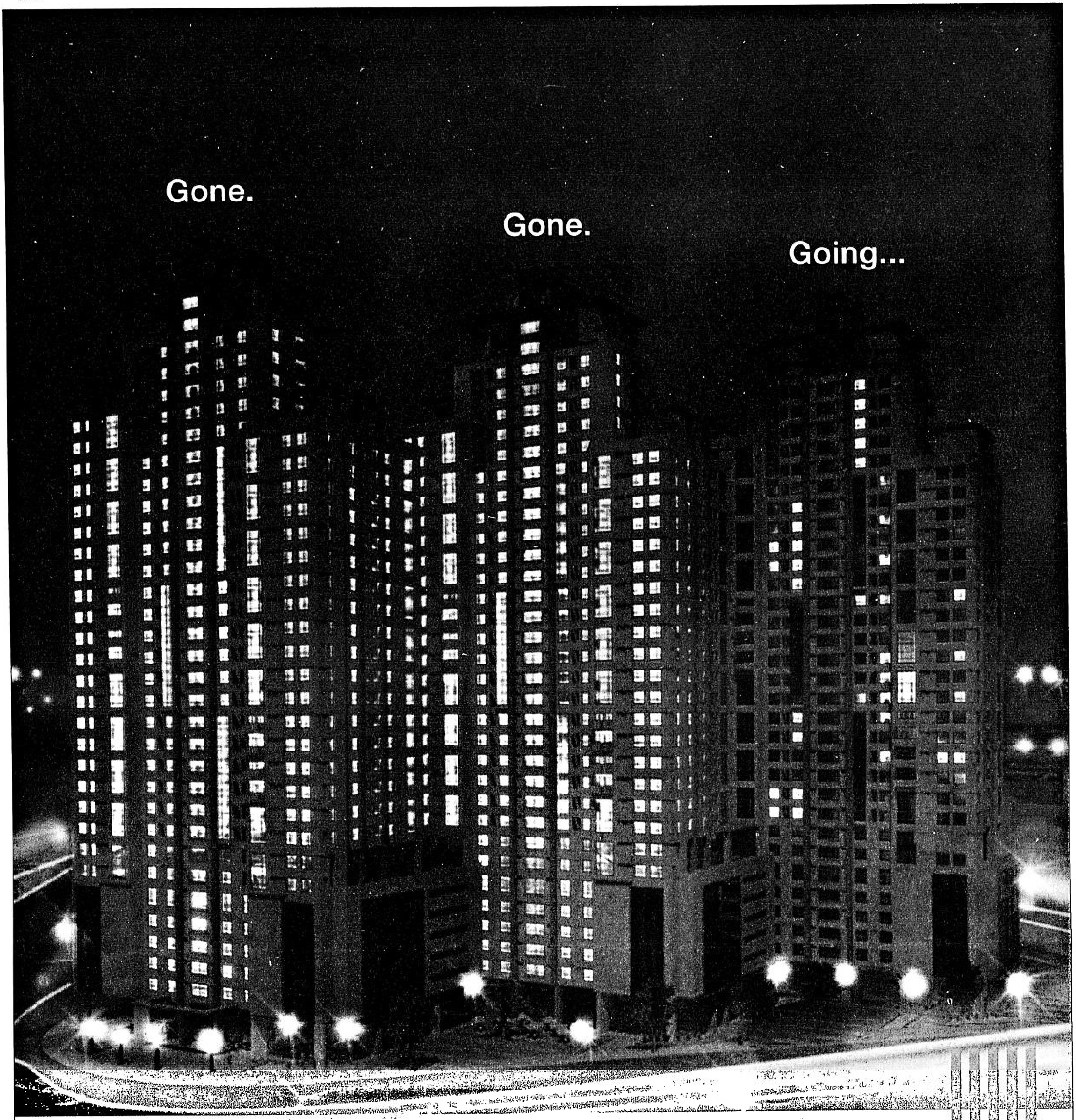
The Columns, Ayala Avenue is the answer to the dreams of young urban achievers seeking a quality condominium residence within the Makati CBD. Sporting three 30 story towers and a uniquely integrated show-stopping Recreational Club, The Columns, Ayala Avenue is one of the most talked-about properties in town.

Community Innovations, Inc. is dedicated to providing carefully-planned and meticulously-designed communities. An Ayala Land company, CII backs its bold mission with the experience and reputation of Ayala Land as the country's leading developer.

Designers of The Columns, Ayala Avenue have described the emerging community as "a vertical village." The Recreational Club of The Columns, Ayala Avenue is more than a conglomeration of amenities. It provides areas for the health and well-being of residents, in privacy and in community.

The Recreational Club provides features that are the equivalent of those in a country club or posh recreational center. For the cost of a studio, a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom, the owners of The Columns, Ayala Avenue units gain a major plus that is the equivalent of a club membership.

For inquiries, please call 750-0471 or 750-0484, email at cii-sales@ayalaland.com.ph or visit www.communityinnovations.com.ph. Model units available for viewing at the 3rd Floor Glorietta 3.

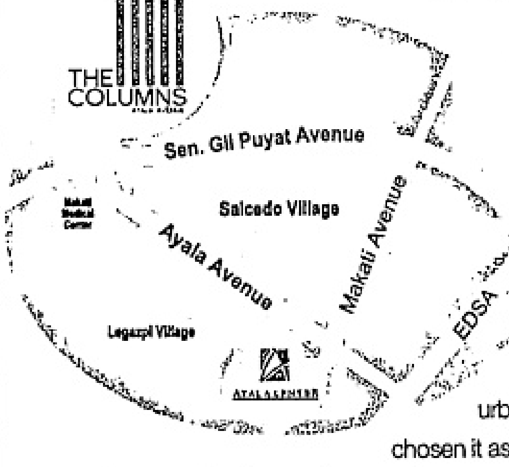


Tower 1 and Tower 2 have enjoyed a quick sell-out. The great news is, we're opening up Tower 3 to buyers! Here's your last chance to live just a few steps from your work, shopping, and hang-out places. THE COLUMNS, Ayala Avenue is rising right at the corner of Ayala and Sen. Gil Puyat Avenues, the ideal address for young, urban achievers who want to live just a few steps from everything.

THE COLUMNS
AYALA AVENUE

TOWER 3 NOW SELLING **As low as P 13,000/month, no downpayment**

Location. Location. Location.



Strategically situated at the corner of Ayala Avenue and Sen. Gil J. Puyat Avenue (Buendia), The Columns, Ayala Avenue, Community Innovations Inc.'s landmark development, has come to redefine urban living. Many have already chosen it as their city address, attracted by its combination of convenience, relaxation, and prestige.

It's the ideal first home for young urban achievers who want to live a few steps from everything. Now, with Tower 3 opening for sale, it's also the last chance to embrace The Columns experience.

Garden in the City

At The Columns, Ayala Avenue, nature communes with urban living. Its open design creates a relaxing environment both in the towers and on the ground. The green Zen-like gardens that adorn the Grand Lobbies of the three towers soothe residents and guests alike.

In the Towers

Each tower offers thirty storeys, twenty-three residential floors, rising on a continuous seven-story podium. The towers are angled to catch bright morning sunshine and avoid afternoon heat. Studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units offer maximized space for the urban lifestyle, with plentiful natural light and ventilation—a prized rarity in residential condos. Splendid views stretch from the Makati skyline to Manila Bay, and selected units on each floor offer bay windows and balconies.

The Columns Experience

By integrating its amenities with its entire lifestyle, The Columns transforms itself into a relaxing refuge that openly encourages the feeling of a real neighborhood. At the seventh floor of the podium, The Recreational Club spans all three towers, and serves as the club and meeting place for this vertical village. Two pools, a fitness center, a game room, function halls, a broad outdoor patio, and a day care center and playground fit the needs of every Columns resident. A jogging path and barbecue areas offer features uncommon to condos. It's all about creating community.

The Ground Floor of The Columns offers outdoor cafes and dining spots clustered around three landscaped plazas. With its quaint shops and al fresco lifestyle, the Ground Floor aims to be a destination in itself at its end of Ayala Avenue.

Live a few steps from everything. For young, dynamic, and energetic individuals, The Columns, Ayala Avenue offers it all: location, quality, reputation, and prestige. It's a chance that's not to be missed. Tower 3 sales are now open.

BY COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS INC.
An AYALA Company

Model units are available for viewing.

e-mail us at cii-sales@ayalaland.com.ph or visit us at www.communityinnovations.com.ph for more information.Call tel nos. 750-0484 and 750-0471 HLURB License to Sell Nos. 07183, 06252 and 08178

The virtual world becomes real this year

By Gabriel H. Mercado
Contributor

BLOGS, community sites and services will expand, all-purpose gadgets will find their identity, and the old PC will remain unchallenged.

The phenomenal Friendster.com, Mygimmick.com, Pinoyexchange.com, Yahoogroups, dating sites, forum sites and instant messaging. What do these have in common?

The ability to bring people together, form communities, chat, interact, meet, group, talk, discuss, question, answer, and just basically "hang out."

To me, this is also one of the most significant contributions of the Internet: it erases the geographical and social boundaries to bring people together, without regard for location, demographic, race, creed, gender, gender preferences, hair color and musical inclination.

> The ability to bring people together—to interact, chat, hang out, form communities—makes the Internet indispensable

My forecast is that more software and web developers would see these for what it is, a triumph of human nature over technology.

Blogging and personal sites

Web logs or "Blogs" have matured from mere "online journals" to a hybrid form of communicating. One may see blogging as merely a showcase, a superficial and self-serving way of self-expression. But after a while one realizes that blogs take a shape of their own.

Reading one another's blogs is a different way of carrying on an unhurried but detailed conversation, where one's inputs on an issue gets thought over, discussed, threshed out and dealt with.

My forecast is that more people will discover blogging and see it not as vain self-indulgence but another form of letter writing.

Real convergence

Slowly, whole product lines are dying out because they aren't good enough as a mere single-purpose gadget anymore. One is just not content with mere phones that can text, or PDAs with voluminous address books that can balance checkbooks, or tiny cameras that double as key chains.

No, sir, we've got to have everything, and manufacturers are slowly evolving toward the proverbial Swiss Army knife of gadgets, one that can send SMS, surf the Net, take 6 megapixel 1280 x 1024 hi-res pics with a flash at 8x zoom, take divx movie of the *barkada* on the beach, send it via MMS, Edge, Bluetooth, Infrared or TCP-IP, edit it, print it, attach it to an address book entry, then fax or email it to friends, and all the while, fit comfortably in your pocket while having a large 64k color screen surrounded by a trendy brushed aluminum and black designer leather.

ILLUSTRATION: ALBERT G. RODRIGUEZ

Oh, and we should be able to easily snap on new casings, it should double as a flashlight and a can opener, and cost less than P15,000.

Kidding aside, my forecast is that many gadgets will start making real sense this year. Many of the jack-of-all-trade technologies will become more appealing for the everyday Juan and Maria. So long as the gadget geeks keep buying, the manufacturers will keep trying, and they'll eventually get them right.

Faster, cheaper PCs

There are those who say that the PC will become obsolete, to be replaced by single-purpose appliances in the next five years. Nuts to that.

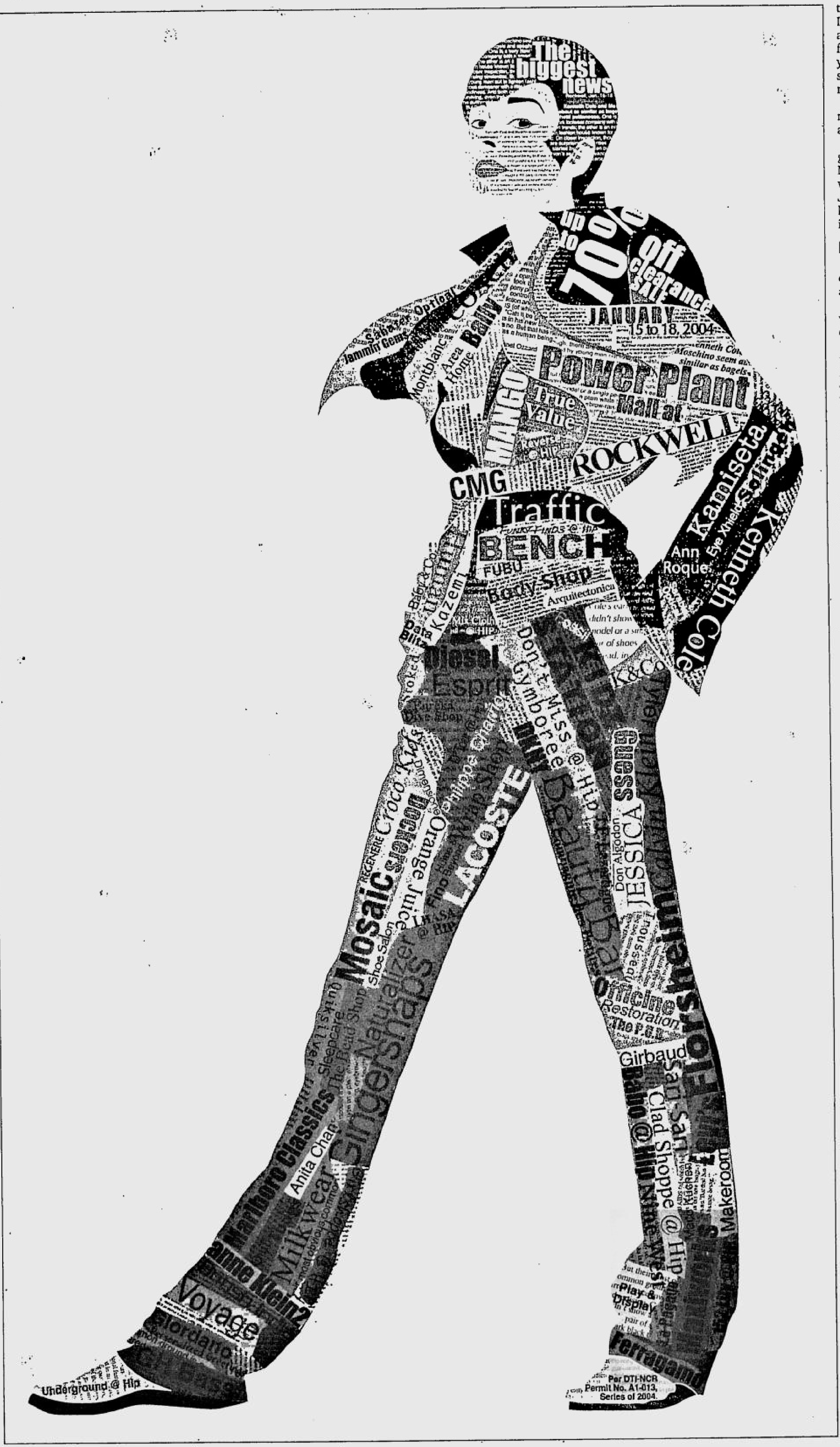
You can do many things in many different ways with the PC. And it's getting cheaper to do these things, too.

Many items in a PC have reached performance levels. CD-ROMs are giving way to DVD writers, a gigabyte of hard disk space is cheaper than ever, and honestly, what could we possibly need with a 64 bit processor?

I imagine someone would develop some astounding game. Sure, computer-aided design (CAD) engineers and large database programmers wait in glee, but for the rest of us, that old Pentium 2 or 3 is quite sufficient.

My forecast is that we will be seeing really good PC specs for less than P20,000 this year. I won't go into details, but suffice it to say the PC you buy this year won't make you want to buy another one until the old one breaks. That includes a good printer, which at the moment are already being given away free.

E-mail the author at gary@exchange.ph



A more exciting . . .

From page C1

Philippines, is going to extend its popularity, while beach football, if only it will get proper guidance from its proponents, should find its place in the sun.

The masses will find it hard to identify themselves with jetski, in spite of its fast and furious reputation. But nobody cares, really.

Boxing, thanks to Manny Pacquiao's rapid-fire, explosive punches, will continue to be a favorite. As Pacquiao, minus his famous nightouts, continues to floor the opposition, Harry Tañamor and company will come into focus.

Reason: Boxing is the country's sole hope for an Olympic gold.

Make no mistake about it—boxing will land a medal in Athens, with the color (gold, silver, bronze) still to be determined.

With the election just around the corner, the sporting scene is surely to be affected.

Don't laugh. Brace yourself. But Amay Bisaya and Palito ending as PSC commissioners isn't an impossible dream. It can happen if FPJ takes it all.

CONTROVERSIAL. Despite questions about his nationality, Asi Taulava, seen here battling Sta. Lucia's Dennis Espino for the ball, has emerged as the league's best pro hoopster.

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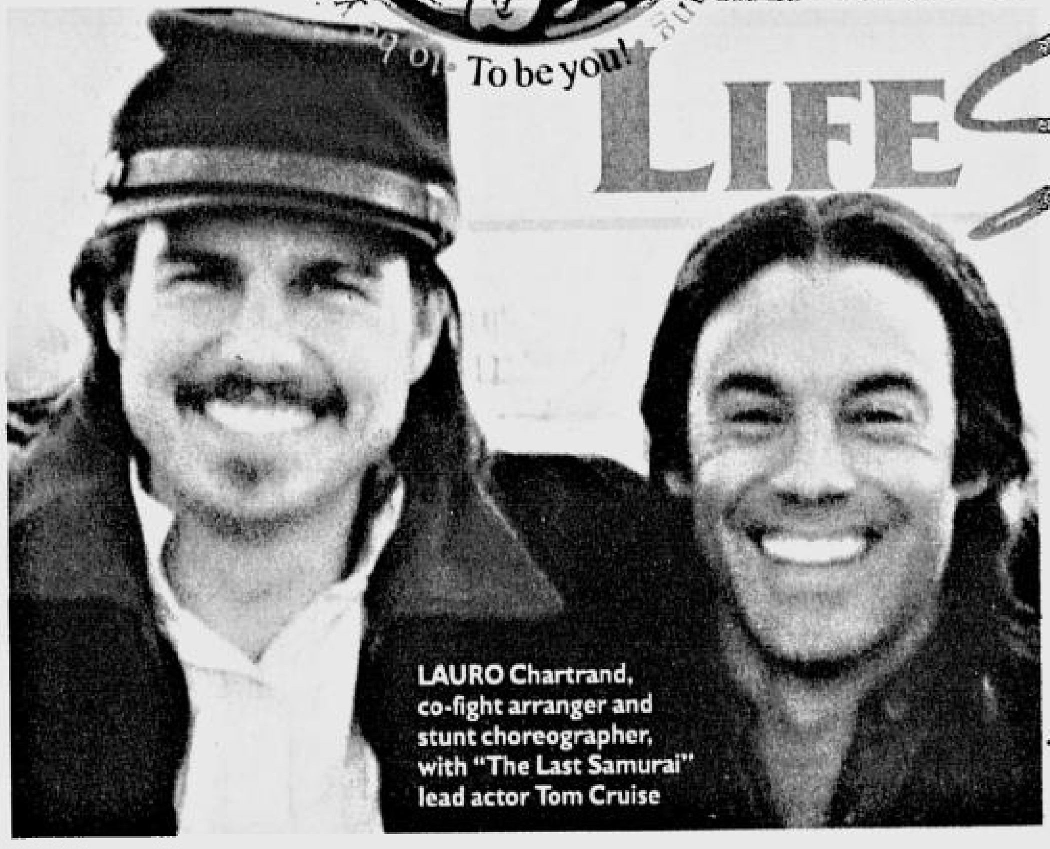
Tom Cruise's 'Samurai teacher' loves 'adobo'


LAURO Chartrand, co-fight arranger and stunt choreographer, with "The Last Samurai" lead actor Tom Cruise

Marriage to a Filipina has made stuntman Lauro Chartrand familiar with Pinoy dishes

By Janet Susan R. Nepales
LA Correspondent

LOS ANGELES—Stunt coordinator and performer, fight choreographer and actor Lauro Chartrand has never been to the Philippines but, he exclaims, "I love *adobo*!"

The good-looking American-Canadian professional stuntman has good reason to know about the Philippines and Filipino food—he is the husband of Filipino-American actress Nia Peeples (Steven Seagal's co-star in the action-thriller "Half Past Dead" and Chuck Norris' co-star in the hit television series "Walker, Texas Ranger"). They have one daughter, Sienna Noelle.

Nia (Virenia Rubic Peeples), whose family is from Cebu, met her future husband in the Norris TV series where Chartrand created and coordinated the fights for all the characters.

"Nia and I haven't been to the Philippines yet but we both want to come and visit one of these days," Chartrand says. In the meantime, he enjoys Nia's *pancit*, *lumpia* and *adobo*.

Chartrand was stunt double for Al Pacino in "Insomnia," fought Jackie Chan in "Shanghai Noon" and "Rumble in the Bronx," and was with Antonio Banderas in the "13th Warrior."

Born in Seattle, Washington, Chartrand moved to Northern Saskatchewan, Canada at age 6 when his mother bought a small ranch in the wilderness. He dreamed of becoming a stuntman after watching a Norris movie, telling his mother he wanted to be the guy the actor was throwing through windows.

Tutoring a superstar

A professional stunt coordinator for the past 13 years, he recently helped train superstar Tom Cruise for the fight scenes in the blockbuster Warner Bros. Pictures action epic, "The Last Samurai."

"It was my first time to work with Tom and what a great experience it was," says the affable Chartrand who was trained in shotokan, karate, aikido, judo, kobudo, taekwondo and jujitsu.

He says working with Cruise, who was also co-producer of the movie, "was as good as it gets! Tom is amazing! I am truly a fan of Tom Cruise, the person."

Chartrand says Cruise is unlike many actors who can be difficult. "Everyday that I worked with Tom, he continued to impress me with his great attitude, hard work and respect for other people. He is the ultimate professional and the nicest guy you'll ever work with," he enthuses.

The respected stunt personality, who has worked with such action directors as John Woo, Stanley Tong, John Glen and John McTiernan, adds, "Tom is an amazing athlete and has the ability to catch on very quickly. We actually had to keep slowing Tom down. He was too fast, too quick! We wanted him to look clean and strong and, sometimes, with too much speed that gets compromised. I would have to say his biggest strength is his mind. He has an amazing ability to focus through anything, which for an athlete can be the most important."

Award nominations

Critics have praised the very realistic fight scenes in the movie. Cruise got a Golden Globe nomination for best actor (drama) as the Civil War veteran Col. Nathan Algren

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WALLPAPER: C5
LYRICS: LY5
Harder To Breathe
Maroon 5
Songs About Jane
RINGTONE: N8
POLYTONE: T8
WALLPAPER: C8
LYRICS: LY8
Because Of You
Kyla
Perfectly Acoustic
RINGTONE: N9
POLYTONE: T9
WALLPAPER: C9
LYRICS: LY9
Maybe
King
Solo
RINGTONE: N4
POLYTONE: T4
WALLPAPER: C4
LYRICS: LY4
My Immortal
Evanescence
Fallen
RINGTONE: N6
POLYTONE: T6
WALLPAPER: FREE*
LYRICS: LY6
A Voice Within
Christina Aguilera
Stripped
RINGTONE: N1
POLYTONE: T1
WALLPAPER: C1
LYRICS: LY1
Slow
Kylie Minogue
Body Language
RINGTONE: N3
POLYTONE: T3
WALLPAPER: C3
LYRICS: LY3
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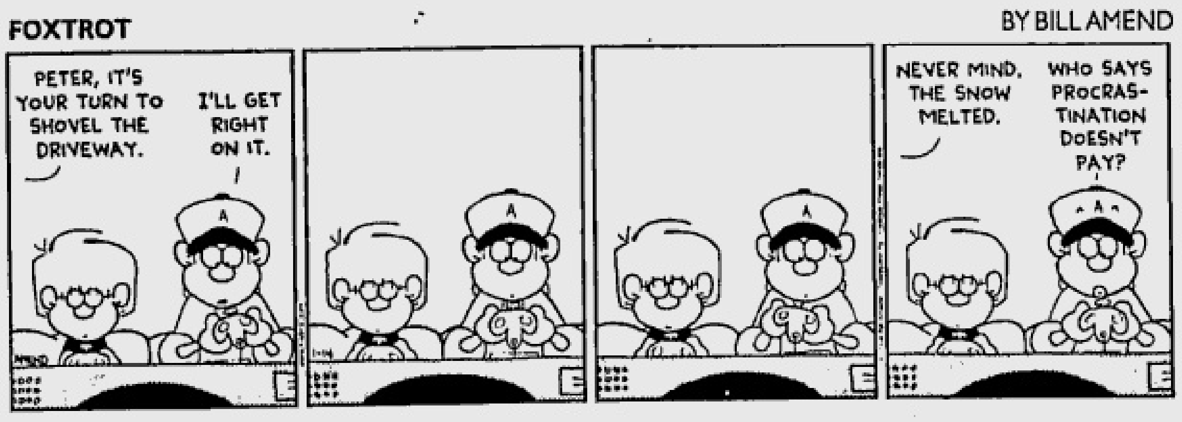
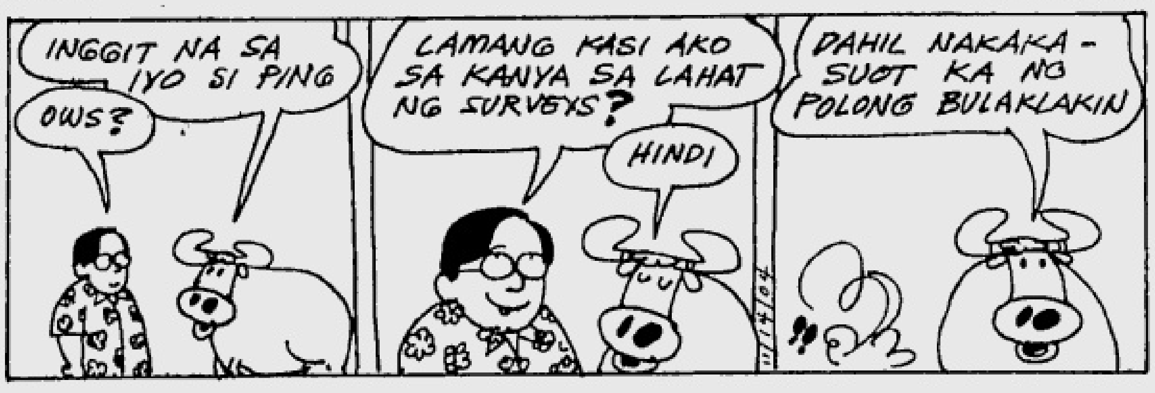
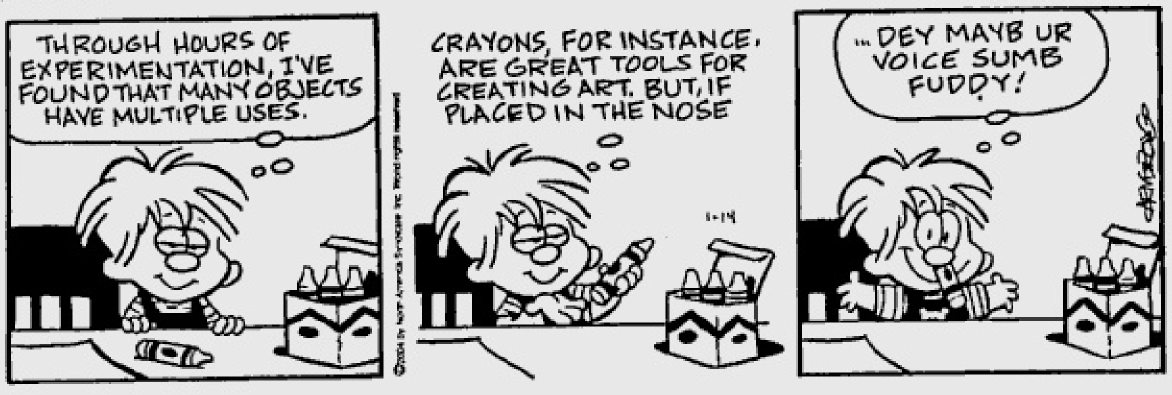

PETER, IT'S YOUR TURN TO SHOVEL THE DRIVEWAY.
I'LL GET RIGHT ON IT.
NEVER MIND. THE SNOW MELTED.
WHO SAYS PROCRASTINATION DOESN'T PAY?

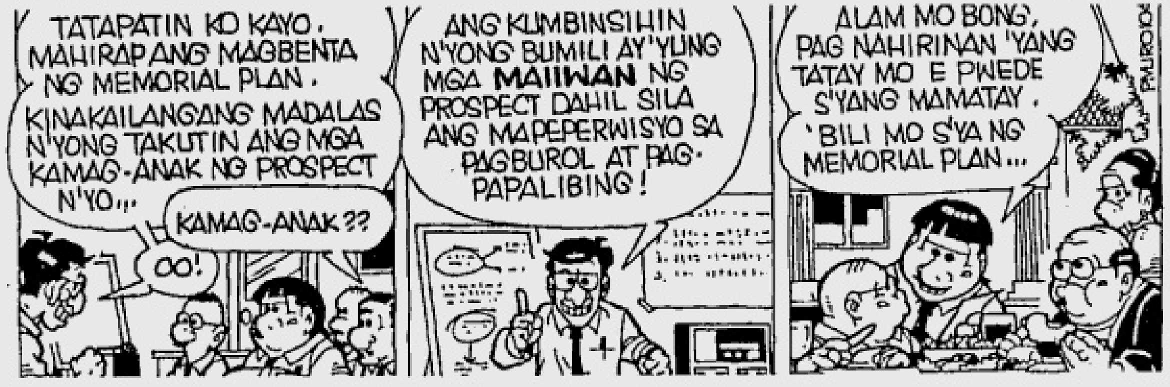
A. LIPIN BY JESS ABRERA


INGGIT NA SA IYO SI PING
OWS?
LAMANG KASI AKO SA KANYA SA LAHAT NG SURVEYS?
HINDI
DAHIL NAKAKA-SUOT KA NG POLONG BULAKLAKIN

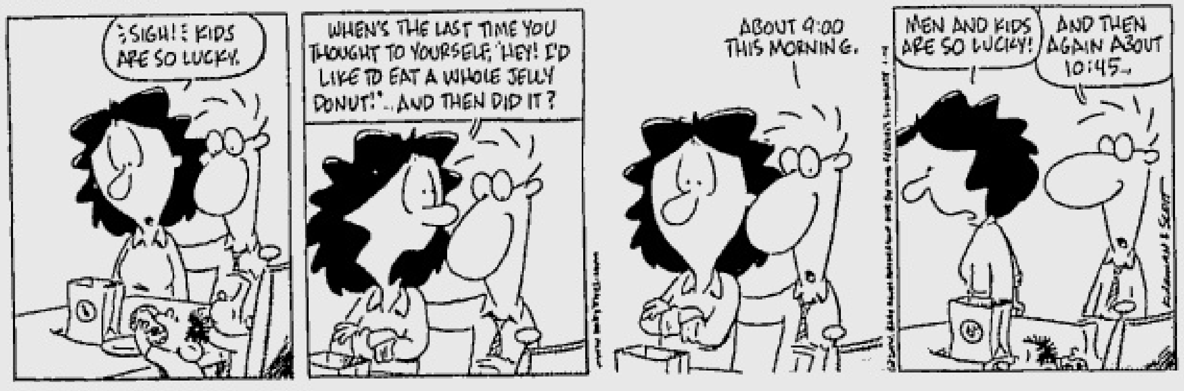
MARVIN BY TOM ARMSTRONG


THROUGH HOURS OF EXPERIMENTATION, I'VE FOUND THAT MANY OBJECTS HAVE MULTIPLE USES.
CRAYONS, FOR INSTANCE, ARE GREAT TOOLS FOR CREATING ART. BUT, IF PLACED IN THE NOSE
1-14
...DEY MAYB UR VOICE SUMB FUDDY!

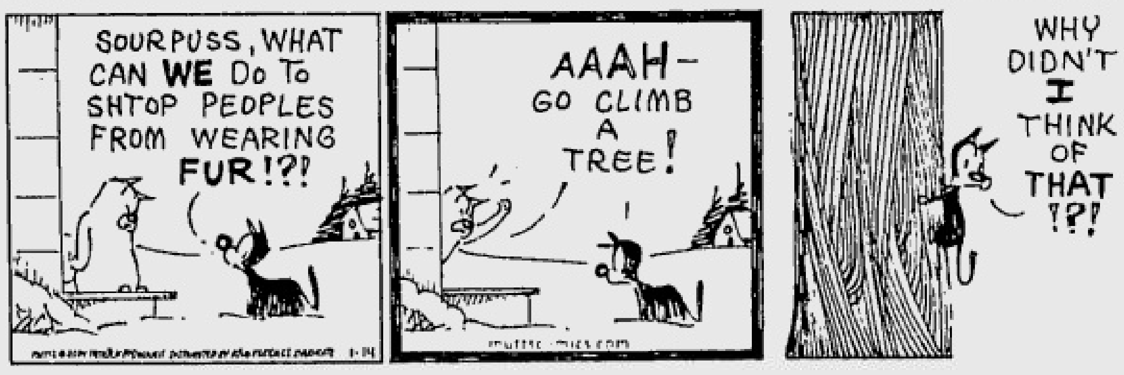
PUGAD BABOY BY P.M. JUNIOR


TATAPATIN KO KAYO. MAHIRAP ANG MAGBENTA NG MEMORIAL PLAN.
KINAKAILANGANG MADALAS N'YONG TAKUTIN ANG MGA KAMAG-ANAK NG PROSPECT N'YO...
KAMAG-ANAK??
OO!
ANG KUMBINSIHIN N'YONG BUMILI AY 'YUNG MGA MAIIWAN NG PROSPECT DAHIL SILA ANG MAPEPERWISYO SA PAGBUROL AT PAGPAPALIBING!
ALAM MO BONG, PAG NAHIRINAN 'YANG TATAY MO E PWEDE S'YANG MAMATAY.
'BILI MO S'YA NG MEMORIAL PLAN...

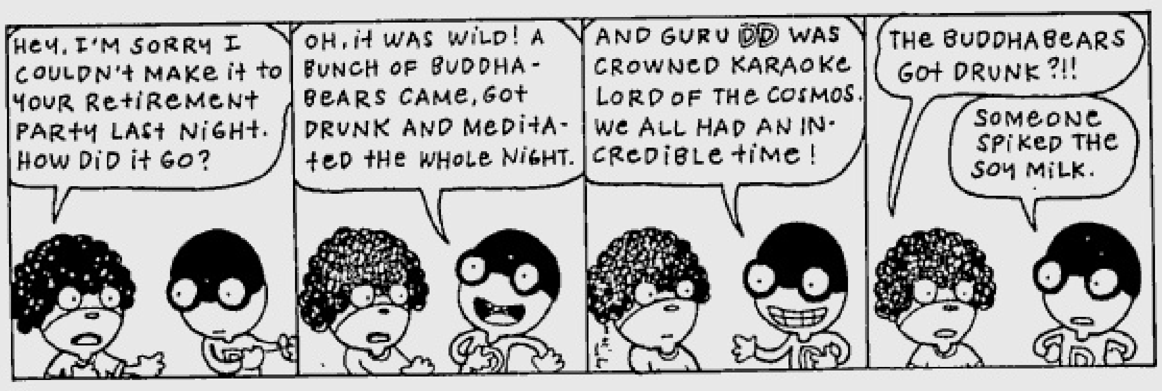
BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT


SIGH! KIDS ARE SO LUCKY.
WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU THOUGHT TO YOURSELF, 'HEY! I'D LIKE TO EAT A WHOLE JELLY DONUT!'... AND THEN DID IT?
ABOUT 9:00 THIS MORNING.
MEN AND KIDS ARE SO LUCKY!
AND THEN AGAIN ABOUT 10:45...

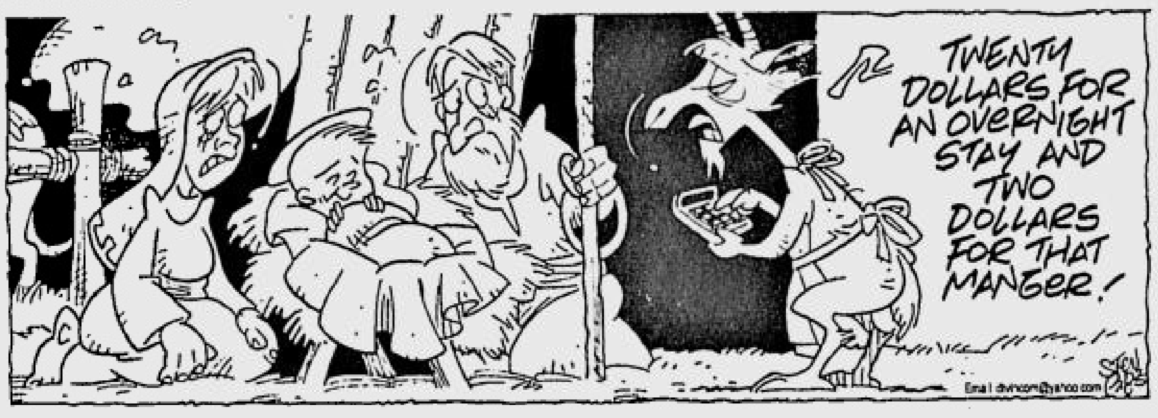
MUTTS BY PATRICK McDONNELL


SOURPUSS, WHAT CAN WE DO TO SHTOP PEOPLES FROM WEARING FUR!?!
AAAH- GO CLIMB A TREE!
WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT !?!

ATOMO AND WEBOY BY LYRA GARCELLANO


HEY, I'M SORRY I COULDN'T MAKE IT TO YOUR RETIREMENT PARTY LAST NIGHT. HOW DID IT GO?
OH, IT WAS WILD! A BUNCH OF BUDDHA-BEARS CAME, GOT DRUNK AND MEDITATED THE WHOLE NIGHT.
AND GURU DD WAS CROWNED KARAOKE LORD OF THE COSMOS. WE ALL HAD AN INCREDIBLE TIME!
THE BUDDHABEARS GOT DRUNK?!!
SOMEONE SPIKED THE SOY MILK.

DIVINE COMEDY BY STEVEN PABALINAS


TWENTY DOLLARS FOR AN OVERNIGHT STAY AND TWO DOLLARS FOR THAT MANGER!
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HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: Your organizational abilities enable you to accomplish much. You are courageous and willingly choose your course in life. Sometimes danger is present in your profession. You feel passionately about social and universal issues. You are a caring individual. Important choices will present themselves to you this year. Choose wisely. **Birthdate of:** Emily Watson, actress; Cecil Beaton, photographer; Faye Dunaway, actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): You might be seized by a sudden desire to show someone a special kindness. Never resist these opportunities. Welcome them as chances to spread random joy. (The world needs it.)

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Unexpected fun and pleasure with a friend today will delight you. Be open to having a good time with others! This is a good day to let new experiences take place in your life.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Others see you as having fun today. You seem to be high-viz in a pleasant, fortunate way. (Sounds good to me.) Consider this your lucky day.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): New and different religious or philosophical concepts surprise and then please you today. (You love learning something new.) Unexpected travel opportunities are also likely.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Be prepared for unexpected gifts or goodies to come your way today. By all means accept! Not only do you deserve it, you will give someone else an opportunity to practice generosity.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): New relationships might suddenly form today. If so, it will likely be with somebody who is radically different from anybody else you know. (Ironically, that is the appeal.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Expect disruptions at work today—they will, however, be pleasant disruptions. Minor occurrences that have shock value definitely give you something to talk about today.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): New romance could pop out of nowhere today! Fun flirtations are lurking everywhere. Playful activities with children please you. Financial speculation looks great.

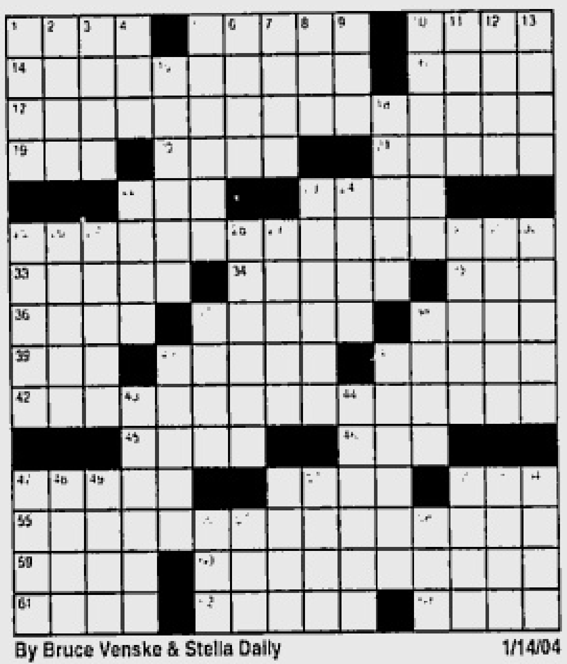
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Lovely, unexpected events can take place at home today or perhaps within your family structure. Someone might give you a gift. You might give somebody else a gift. Either way, good things go round.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Whatever you do to amuse yourself will be delightful today. You can't miss. Just make sure that you are open to spontaneous suggestions and fun activities. Go with the flow!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You can definitely improve your earnings today, or alternatively, you might buy something quite beautiful that surprises and delights you. Unexpected good fortune is possible.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Today you feel lively, restless and ready for fun! Above all, expect the unexpected. A new relationship might come into your life. Sudden financial gains are possible. Whatever happens will please you.

DAILY CROSSWORD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By Bruce Venske & Stella Daily
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1/14/04

ACROSS
1 Goatee site
5 Mrs. Flintstone
10 Escritoire
14 Kitchen tools
16 1997 Peter Fonda role
17 "Star Wars" star to anglers?
19 Tire gauge abbr.
20 Brief boxing decisions
21 Denny's rivals
22 Popular ISP
23 Links grp.
25 Catcher to standard?
33 Component parts
34 "Middlemarch" author
35 Adversary
36 Lion's locks
37 Sailor's shout
38 Fossil fuel
39 Tiny portion
40 Nixon's Agnew
41 Drink noisily
42 Panelist to vegetable stems?
45 Big cheese
46 Actor McKellen
47 Sour tasting, formerly
50 California valley
52 Age proofs, for short
55 Actress to orthography contest?
59 Comic strip pup
60 Crawling progress
61 "Death in Venice" author
62 Plains dwelling
63 SS Alex Rodriguez

DOWN
1 Cyrillic USSR
2 Golfer Jay
3 Calvary letters
4 Neither partner
5 At seven-day intervals
6 Scuttlebutt
7 Oahu garlands
8 "__ Dalloway"
9 Last of a cigar
10 Duke's location
11 Ticklish Muppet
12 Ooze
13 Griffey and Kesey
15 Climber's spikes
18 "__ Days a Week"
22 Pot sweetener
23 Concord
24 Stirling citizen
25 Extra-large
26 During a broadcast
27 Pointers
28 Flocks of females
29 Satellite of Jupiter
30 Run __ of the law
31 Author of "John Henry"
32 Seaweeds
37 Police alerts: abbr.
38 Social unit
40 Uppity ones
41 Blemishes
43 Conan or Pat
44 Figure of speech
47 Tiny particle
48 Musical ending
49 "__ Brockovich"
50 Smacking blow
51 Mr. Nastase
52 Support piece
53 Art __
54 Parakeet staple
56 L.A. hrs.
57 WSW opp.
58 Coll. student's letters

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved

J	A	D	A	■	E	T	A	L	■	B	U	N	T	S
O	L	A	V	■	S	E	L	A	■	A	V	I	A	N
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■	■	■	O	R	R	S	■	E	C	L	A	I	R	S
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L	I	A	N	A	■	N	E	M	O	■	S	L	I	P
K	N	U	C	K	L	E	S	A	N	D	W	I	C	H
S	A	L	E	■	A	T	O	N	■	H	A	L	E	Y
■	■	■	■	W	R	A	P	■	S	O	N	A	R	S
S	T	O	G	I	E	S	■	A	W	L	S	■	■	■
C	Y	P	R	E	S	S	K	N	E	E	■	J	E	B
O	L	E	I	N	■	E	L	I	A	S	H	O	W	E
F	E	R	M	I	■	T	E	S	T	■	R	E	A	D
F	R	A	M	E	■	S	E	E	S	■	S	Y	N	E

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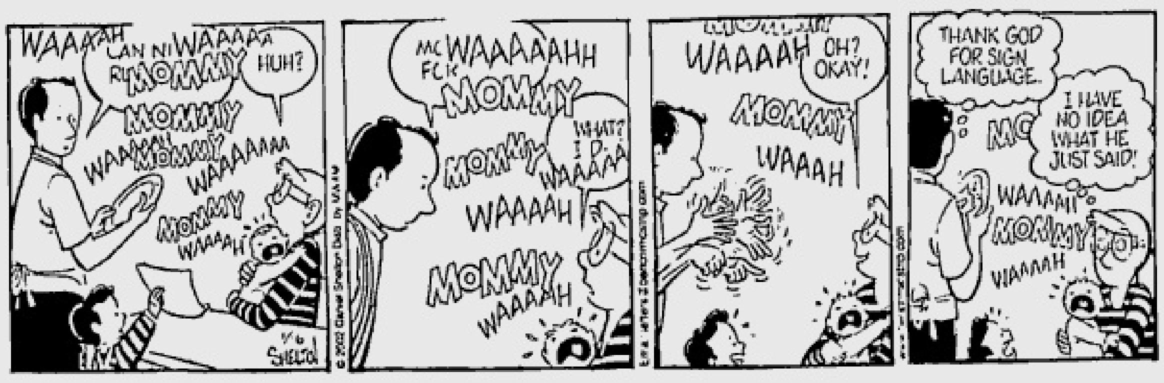
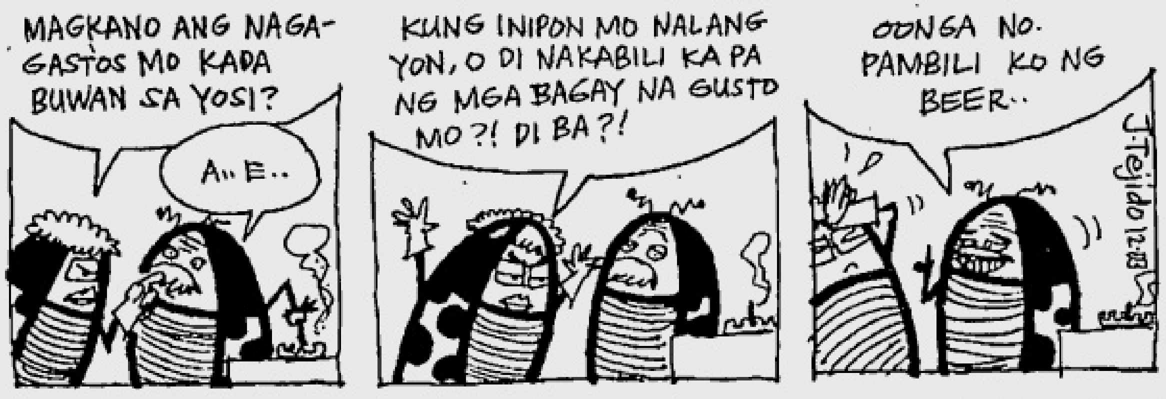
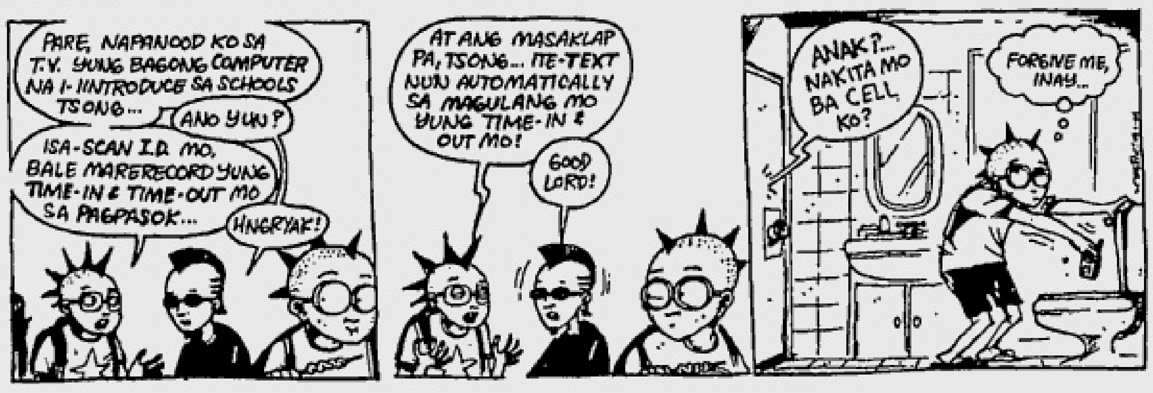
BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON


WAAAAH
MOMMY
HUH?
WAAAAAAHH
MOMMY
WHAT? I D...
WAAAAH
OH? OKAY!
MOMMY
WAAAH
THANK GOD FOR SIGN LANGUAGE.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HE JUST SAID!
WAAAAH
MOMMY

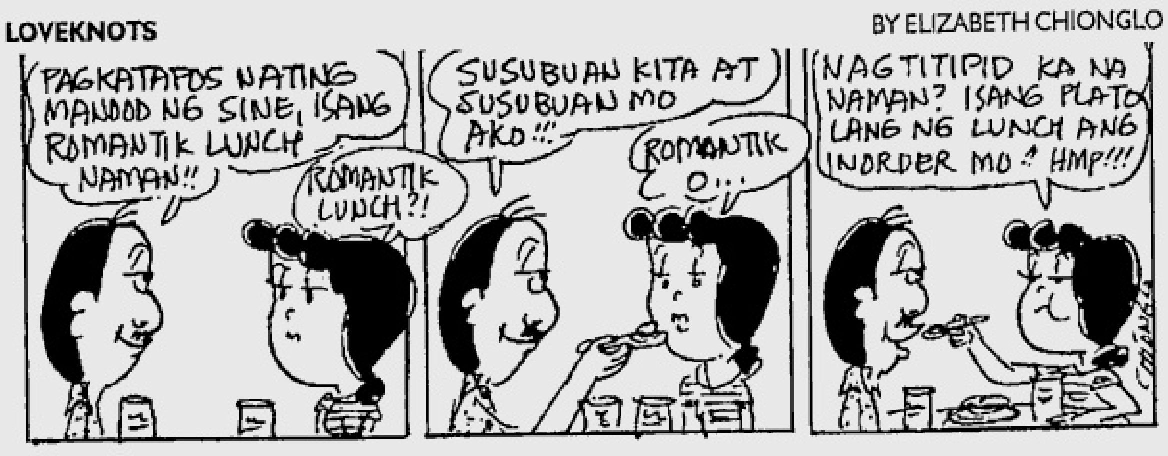
MIKROKOSMOS BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


MAGKANO ANG NAGA-GASTOS MO KADA BUWAN SA YOSI?
A.. E..
KUNG INIPON MO NALANG YON, O DI NAKABILI KA PA NG MGA BAGAY NA GUSTO MO?! DI BA?!
OONGA NO. PAMBILI KO NG BEER..
J.Tejido

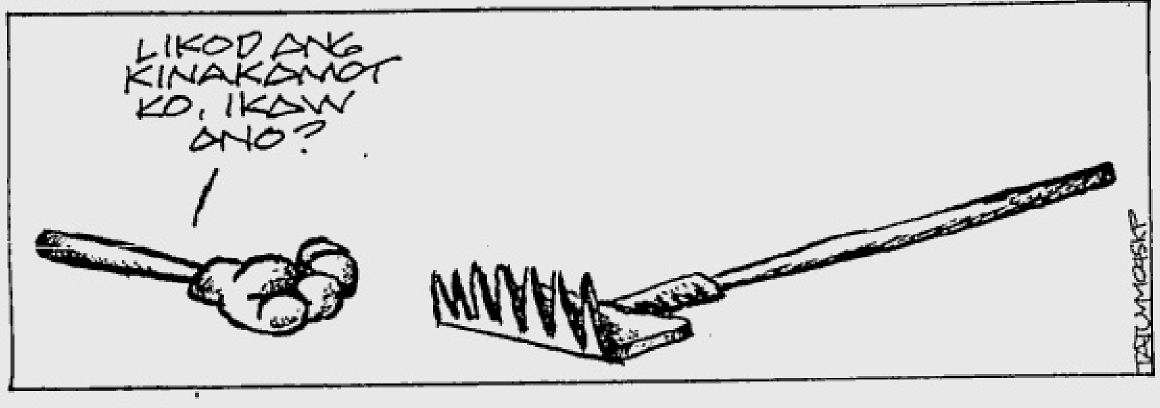
KIKO MACHINE BY MANIX ABRERA


PARE, NAPANOOD KO SA T.V. YUNG BAGONG COMPUTER NA I-IINTRODUCE SA SCHOOLS TSONG...
ANO YUN?
ISA-SCAN I.D. MO. BALE MARERECORD YUNG TIME-IN & TIME-OUT MO SA PAGPASOK...
HNGRYAK!
AT ANG MASAKLAP PA, TSONG... ITE-TEXT NUN AUTOMATICALLY SA MAGULANG MO YUNG TIME-IN & OUT MO!
GOOD LORD!
ANAK?... NAKITA MO BA CELL KO?
FORGIVE ME, INAY...

LOVEKNOTS BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO

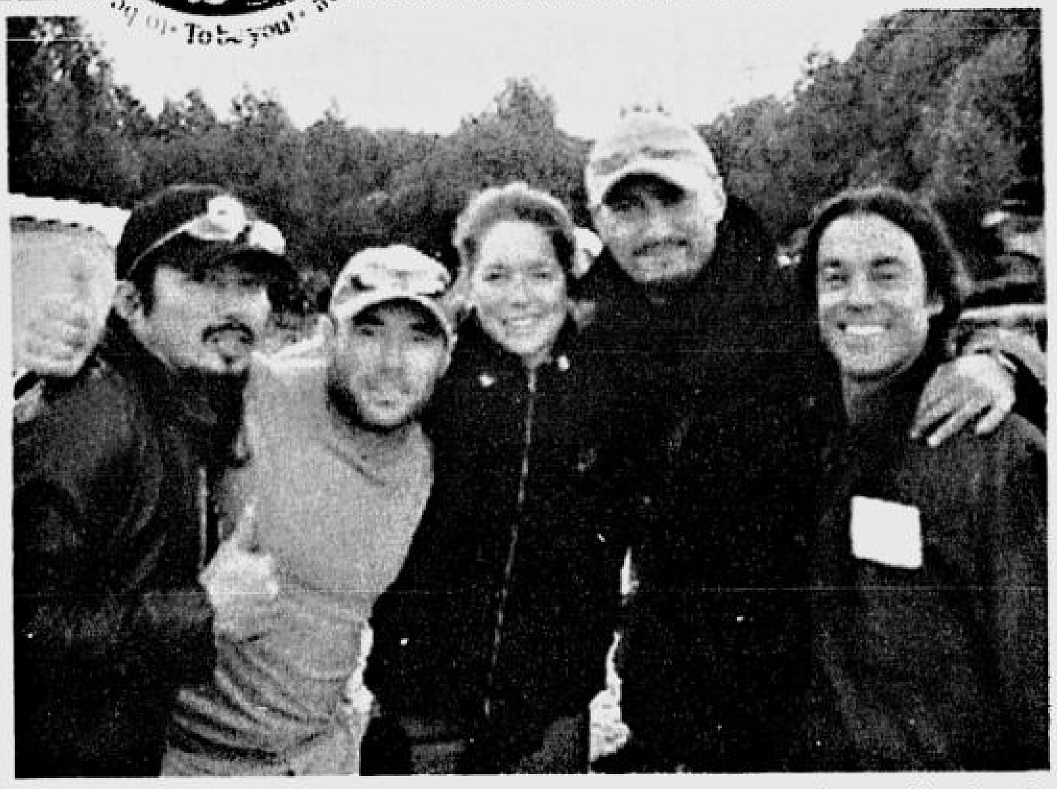

PAGKATAPOS NATING MANOOD NG SINE, ISANG ROMANTIK LUNCH NAMAN!!
ROMANTIK LUNCH?!
SUSUBUAN KITA AT SUSUBUAN MO AKO!!!
ROMANTIK O...
NAGTITIPID KA NA NAMAN? ISANG PLATO LANG NG LUNCH ANG INORDER MO!! HMP!!!

TULDOK BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


LIKOD ANG KINAKAMOT KO, IKAW ANO?

CHARTRAND demonstrating some proper cutting and reaction techniques to the stuntmen of "The Last Samurai"

Tom Cruise's 'Samurai teacher' loves 'adobo'



CHARTRAND (right) with cast and crew members of "The Last Samurai": actor Hiro Sanada (as Ujio), Nick Powell (stunt coordinator), Melissa Stubbs (assistant stunt coordinator) and actor Ken Watanabe (as Katsumoto)

From page D1

while co-star Ken Watanabe was nominated for best supporting actor for his role as Katsumoto, leader of the venerated Japanese warriors or samurais.

Asked what he does as co-fight arranger, Chartrand explains that he works with the stunt coordinator (Nick Powell) and the director (Ed Zwick) in establishing the feel, style and look of the fights. "Of course, I have to read the script and know the story and all of its characters so that we can make it all work according to the story line," he says.

"I start out choreographing... a particular scene with the stuntmen—usually the stunt doubles... Once I feel I am close to what I believe they may be looking for, I show it to the stunt coordinator (who) may make a few changes or (present it) to the director. If the director likes it, then we show it to the actors... so they can be confident it will work for them. So, I am responsible for guiding the fight from the page to the screen while changing it and shaping it to what the stunt coordinator, director and actor want it to be."

Hired by stunt coordinator Powell, Chartrand says he was shocked and excited when the project was offered to him. "I have been studying Japanese martial arts for 20 years so this was a dream project for me. I just wanted to make sure we were going to do it realistically, not all flashy and Hollywood style," he says.

Training program

Did he train Cruise and in what? The 38-year-old stuntman who admits he has seen the movie five times already, says, "Nick Powell had already been training Tom for a month or so when I came on board... in some basic wu shu sword maneuvers to gain flexibility and strength in his wrists and forearms, along with some basic Japanese sword techniques. Tom had to use two swords in a lot of the scenes.... From there, as Nick got busy with other aspects of the movie, I continued to train Tom and included aikido, karate, judo and jujitsu techniques as well as advanced his sword techniques."

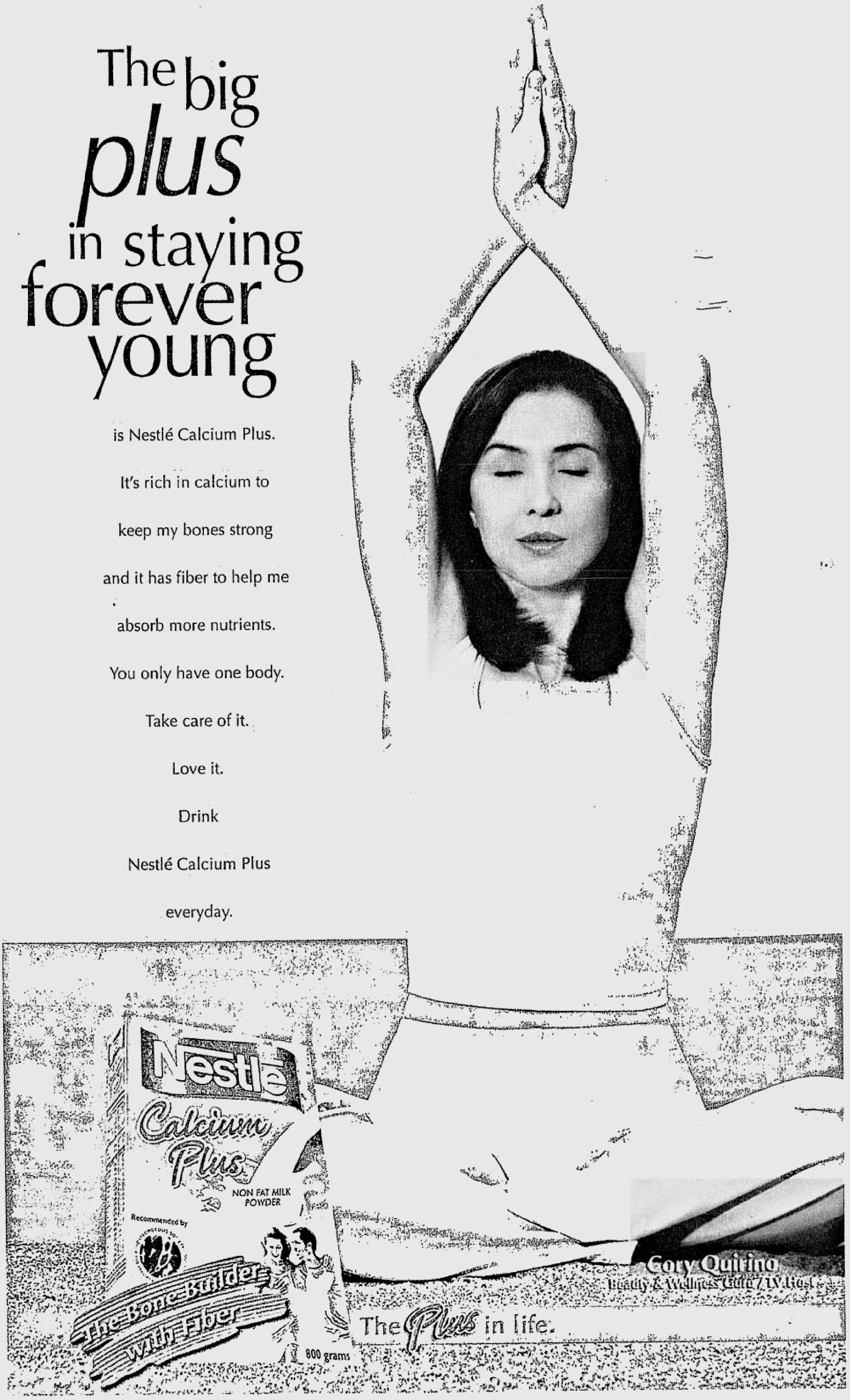
He adds, "Then we got heavy into the choreography with Tom because he had so many fights in the film. We also did a lot of horsemanship training... so he can be confident and comfortable doing everything on a horse that he would do on the ground."

Chartrand didn't work as a stunt double in the movie but he did a couple of stunts as a Native American in Cruise's flashback sequences.

His next project will be as stunt coordinator for "Walk His Trail," which will be shooting in Panama for two-and-a-half months starting in January. He says it is the true story of missionaries, who died trying to save a tribe in South America from being wiped out.

Will he recommend the Bushido way of life to Japanese youth or the X generation in general? Chartrand readily replies, "Of course! There is no better way than to live with honor and respect... I believe our world would be a better place if more people were honorable and respectful. There is too much dog eat dog in the world today. You should always fight to win but with honor."

CHARTRAND and Filipino-American wife actress Nia Peeples rehearse some stunts.



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Tim Yap

IT was a night of "bondage" at V bar recently when Bond, played by **Marc Nelson**, and the women who love him, played by every girl present at V that time—had close encounters of every kind that seductive evening.

The event? Astring-O-Sol's racy night with Bond. The majestic mouthwash leapt out of the rest room and into the bar's vestibules. If this were a person, it would've screamed, "I'm sick of being beside the faucet! I wanna go where the action is—I wanna be the star!"

That night, the bets were all placed on the "A"-listers present. The phrase "Put your money where your mouth is" couldn't have found a better par-tee.

Filling up the bar formerly known as Venezia, the city's usual party pack were elbow to elbow with excitement as Wai Lin, Elektra King and Xenia Onatapp—all Bond femme fatale—romped and posed with the energy of bunnies roaming around Hugh Hefner's mansion and smelling each other's breaths (okay, no lesbian fantasies here.)

Martinis and mouthwash

Just like any party in the city, martinis flowed like water in this event. Every table was topped with Astring-O-Sol bottles. I swear I was about to down the mouthwash at one time, thinking it was a mint-flavored concoction.

And if you think martinis and mouthwash don't mix, think again. To be in a state of inebriation and to have mouthwash-fresh breath can give anyone the courage to dare—and dare the party pack did!

Later that night, couples got to be so much more than cuddly that I wanted to die another day as the world was not enough for all these partyphiles in random revelry.

"For your eyes only," **Val Trono**, posing as Bond nemesis Jinx, whispered into my ears.

One courageous girl who had that golden eye (or is it Goldfinger?) quickly latched on to our Aussie-accented Bond, saw a view to a kill and gave Marc Nelson a kiss that seemed to last forever!

"That's the spy who loved me," Marc said as he continued his martini mouthwash swishing.

Intimate bonding moments like these always give parties that added boost. So excuse me while I gargle.

Things to look forward to

Speaking of daring to be closer, my friend **Celine Lopez** and I agreed that the year 2004 should be the year of commitment—for those who are sick of playing around. Or re-commitment, if you're already committed.

Which is in contrast to the playfulness of the Year of the Monkey, which is about to debut next week. All roads will lead to the Mandarin Oriental, annually the epicenter of Chinoise activity this side of Makati.

Also something to look forward to this first month of the year is **Michael Buble**'s one-night-only concert on Jan 30 at PICC, part of his 2004 Asian tour. Want tickets? Go to Ticketworld, located at all National Book Stores, or call 8915610, 8919999, 0917-7917548, 0918-5878960, 0916-4766790, 0927-2415082, 0919-4127461; or the PICC box office at 5517020 to reserve those tickets—before it's too late!

Michael Buble will also be performing at the Waterfront Hotel in Cebu, on Jan. 31.

Next up, Valentine's.

Have a Super! love-filled year, dear partyphiles.

UP close and personal. Beth Bañez and Mikey Garcia

NOT too shy to be kissed, Kartika Guerrero gets her just rewards.

CHEEKY PAIR. Gabby Roa and Peter Limjoco

CLOSER. Cons Ong and Angelique Gaston

CLOSE FOR COMFORT. Marc Nelson with his bevy of sexy Bond babes

CLOSE CALL. Doraine Cuason and Cristina Antigua

WITHIN kissing distance. Tong Puno and Owen Bobadilla

DARE to breathe. Joseph Tumabiao and Rory Tirona

MUSIC MUSE. Sandra Siefert and DJ David Ardiente

BONDAGE TRIO. Tina Tuason, Alana Montelibano and Mark Licaros at Astring-O-Sol party

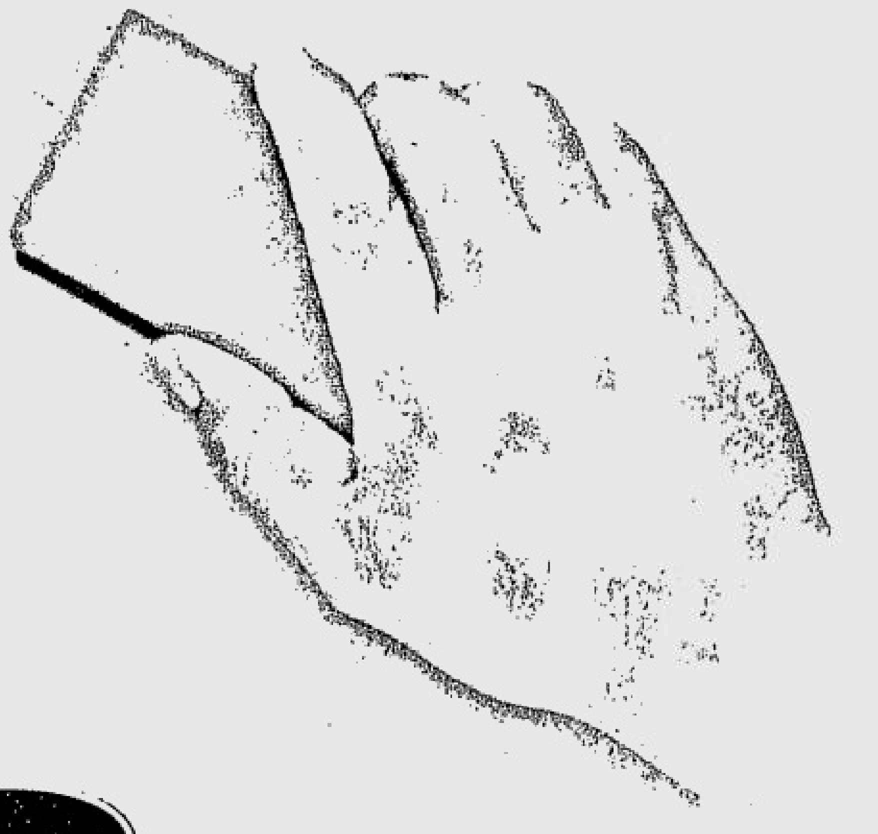
COURAGEOUS Itos Carag dares to be close with Bond ladies Jenny and Melissa at V.

S FILES. Slyde and Sandra in a Bond moment

CLEAR and present danger. Greg Turvey, Melissa Chua and Geoff Rodriguez

GROUP FUN. Marc Nelson, Alvin Trono, Mark Reyes and Val Trono as Jinx

FOUR PLAY. Carl Velasco, Karen Chikiamco, Gary Fallorina and Enrico Tecson



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Wuzup dude LOGO WUZUP1
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Mandy	*Westlife*	**TONE MANDY**
Re-offender	*Travis*	**TONE REOFF**
The Whole Of The Moon	*Mandy Moore*	**TONE WHOLEMOON**
Tonight's The Night	*Pink*	**TONE 2NYTPINK**
Signed, Sealed, Deliverd I'm Yours	*Blue*	**TONE SIGNED**
Ladies Night	*Atomic Kitten*	**TONE LADIESN**
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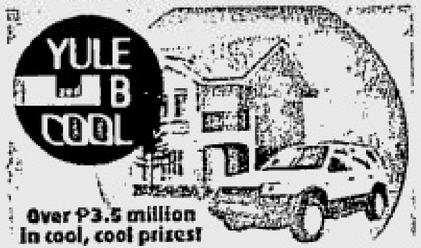

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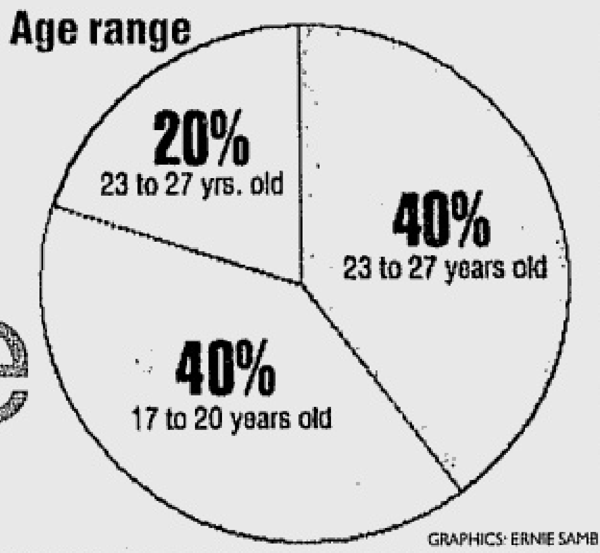
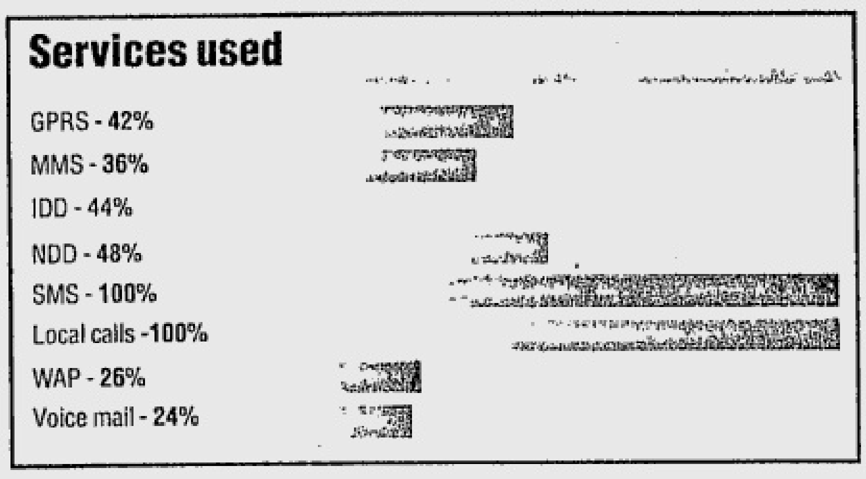
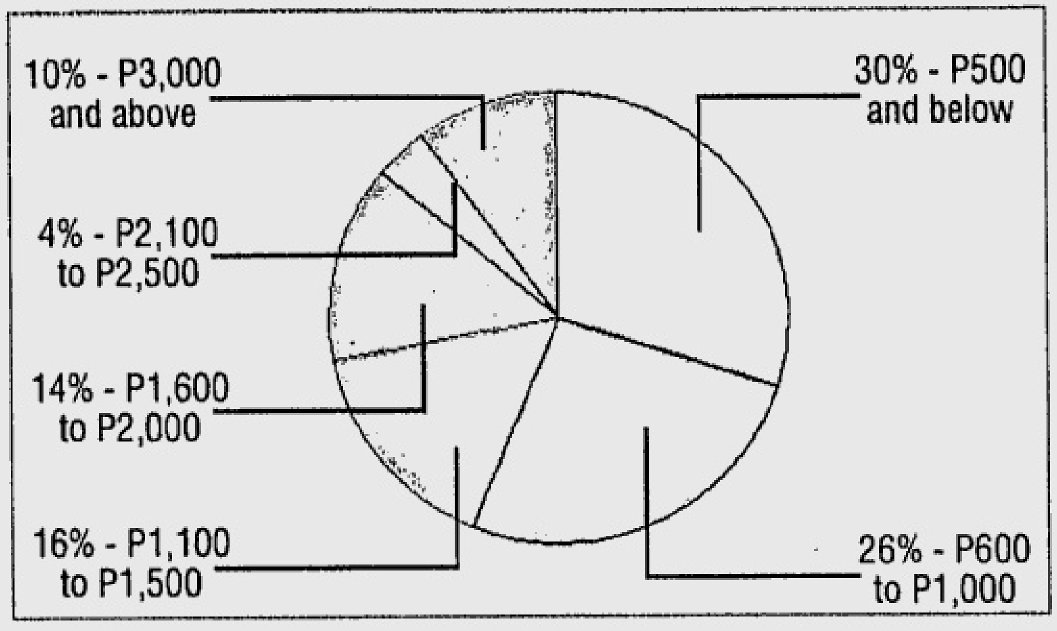




GRAPHICS: ERNIE SAMBO



Not as much as you think. Really

By Pam Pastor

THIS may come as a shock, but no, Pinoy kids aren't spending as much on mobile phone use as you think.

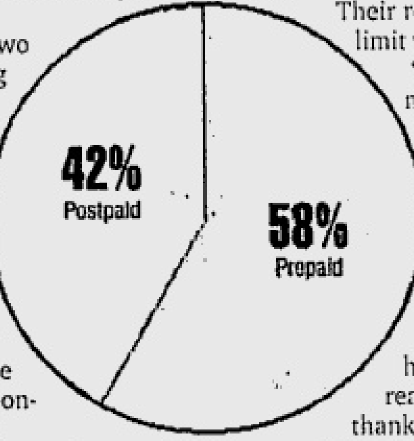
While concern has been raised over their Western counterparts racking up debts because of excessive cell phone use, young people in the Philippines still know what it takes to keep their finances in check. And no, they're not running to mom and dad.

2bU! surveyed 50 randomly selected people between the ages of 17 and 34 about their mobile phone habits. The results are surprising and somewhat comforting.

The respondents

Forty percent of the respondents fall into the 17-22 age group, 40 percent are 23-27 years old, and 20 percent are 28-34 years old.

Sixty-six percent are Globe users while 34 percent are Smart subscribers. Fifty-eight percent use prepaid connections while 42 percent are on postpaid plans.



Choosing between the two options was not something they did blindly. "I use prepaid so I could control my expenses," Alora, a 20-something assistant editor said.

"Hardcore prepaid 'to, man!" said Cely, 23, a marketing assistant.

Asked how much they spend on their mobile phone use every month, the respondents gave diverse answers.

More than half of the respondents spend under P1,000 monthly.

Eighteen percent spend an average of P300 monthly. Four percent said they spend only P150 a month by making a P300 callcard last for two months.

The rest: P500 (eight percent), P600 (10 percent), P700 (two percent), P800 (six percent), P900 (four percent), P1,000 (four percent), P1,200 (six percent), P1,300 (two percent), P1,500 (eight percent), P1,600 (six percent), P2,000 (eight percent), P2,500 (four percent), P3,000 (eight percent) and P3,500 (two percent).

Sixty-four respondents said they pay for their own phone bills. "I didn't have any problems paying for prepaid cards, especially since I got a job. When I was in school, I always saved up my allowance," said CJ, 22, customer care advocate.

Twenty-eight percent said their parents shell out the cash, while eight percent said the companies they work for reimburse their work-related calls.

Cash or credit?

The chances of finding themselves in debt are remote, as most respondents use cash in paying for their phone. In contrast, young Australians prefer to pay phone bills through credit cards.

Only eight percent of the respondents said they use their credit cards to pay, as against 88 percent who pay cash. Two percent pay through ATM machines, while two percent use online banking.

While 26 percent of the respondents claimed to have trouble paying their bills in the past, the problems were mostly not financially related. The problems included late arrival of bills and being charged for calls they did not make.

Twenty percent of the respondents said while they might have found themselves at one time or another in debt, they got out of the debt rut. None of the respondents said they were in debt at the time of the survey.

Budget

Fifty-six percent said they set a budget for their monthly consumption. Forty-four percent said they do not.

"I don't plan it. *Basta 'pag naubusan ng load, bili*," student Christian, 24, said.

Forty-three percent of those who set a budget said they stick to it, while 57 percent said they do not.

Their reasons for going beyond the limit were varied.

"There are times I really miss my brother who is abroad so I make more calls and SMS than usual," said Jules, 30, an account manager.

"I get carried away talking to friends or calling people abroad," said Cher, 20, a student.

"In my line of work, you have to be courteous. Plus I really am courteous, so I say thank you all the time," said businessman Jugs, 24.

Mobile phones have different purposes for these young people.

Eighty percent said they use their handsets to schedule nightouts, dates or get-togethers. Seventy-eight percent use it for romantic purposes, 92 percent for business, 94 percent for work, 40 percent for school work, 100 percent for communicating with friends and family, and 18 percent for forwarding messages.

The attempt of telecommunications companies to make more money by constantly providing new kinds of services seems to be working.

"I could survive without a new ringtone or logo, but I just keep on downloading them just for fun," said Arlene, a 23-year-old content writer.

Forty-two percent of the respondents said they use their phone's General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) capabilities, while 36 percent use the Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS).

Other results on use of special features: International Direct Dialing or IDD (44 percent), National Direct Dialing or NDD (48 percent), Short Message Service or text-messaging (100 percent), local calls (100 per-

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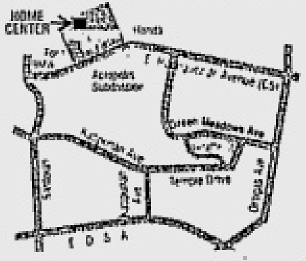

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JANUARY 14, WEDNESDAY

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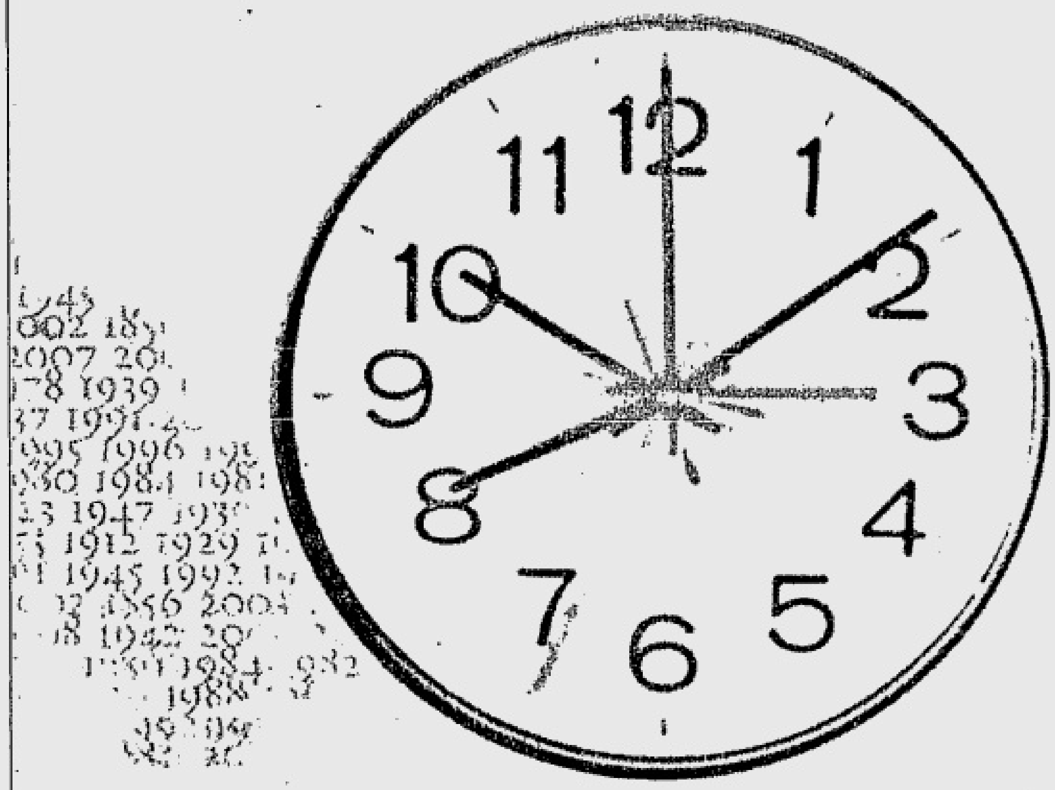

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Hey, kid, how big is your mobile phone bill?

From page E1

cent), Wireless Application Protocol or WAP (26 percent) and voice mail service (24 percent).

But 68 percent complained that the use of SMS and making local calls are to blame for the bulk of their bills.

Sixty-two percent said they do not think they're spending too much on their phones.

"I think it's a necessary tradeoff to being able to conveniently communicate while being mobile," said Romel, 34, a desk editor.

Thirty-eight percent said they think they spend too much. But the study made it evident that "too much" is a relative term.

While Cupid, a 29-year-old IT consultant who spends P2,000 on his phone bills every month, doesn't think his use is excessive, 21-year-old Mela, an editorial production assistant, thinks her P300-a-month consumption is indulgent. "I should be able to stretch the P300 call card to two months."

Numerous outside factors affect young people's mobile phone use. Anne, a 32-year-old journalist, enumerated some of them: "Unexpected events, emergencies, resurrection of a long lost pal, reentry of unwanted parasites into your life, vacationing relatives you'd wish would go home soon, etc."

Other factors include extra-curricular activities, personal problems, trips outside the country and people who borrow their phones.

"My sister usually sneaks off with my phone at night and uses it," said Ara, a 20-year-old information editor.

The respondents also said that their romantic life affects their phone bills. Apparently, bills get smaller when one doesn't have romance.

Bianca, a 19-year-old student said, "My phone bill was a lot higher when there was a special person involved. A lot of text is wasted on sweet nothings, most out them out of habit, reaching out for the phone to say good night which leads to "How was your day?" and before you know it, you've sent each other 50 messages that didn't really mean anything."

Her thoughts were echoed by several others. "When I have a girlfriend, a P300 load usually lasts for about a week. But when I'm single, I could go on for about a month or two," Christian said.

Necessary

If there's one thing that the respondents agree on, it's the necessity of having a mobile phone.

"Although I get irritated when I get my bill, when I think about how it helps me keep in touch with the people who are important to me, I realize that it's worth it," said Walter, a 26-year-old copywriter.

"It's a means to communicate," said Cely, 23.

But these young people know it's not the only means. In fact, they cite their knowledge of IT as a way of controlling their phone expenses.

"Aside from my mobile phone, there are also other things which I can access to be able to communicate, like the Internet, fax and the telephone," 23-year-old training assistant Alex said.

Trina, a 21-year-old media planner said, "I still use the landline whenever possible."

"I'm a traditional user of phones. I surf the net with a personal computer and trade quotes with sheets of paper. My mobile phone does neither," Jeff, a 20-year-old student, added.

Others expressed the importance of consciously regulating personal expenses.

"I have been very thrifty with texting and calling. I really only text or call when I had to or when the occasion calls for it," said CJ, 22.

"I use my phone for only reasonable purposes most of the time," said Marla, a 17-year-old student.

Parents also play a part in instilling fiscal discipline. "There was a time my mom refused to pay my bills unless I cut down on my use. No choice but to do so, or it would mean no phone at all," said Bianca, 19, a student.

Some lessons are learned the hard way. Angela, a 20-year-old student whose phone was stolen some months before, said, "I learned to live without a phone for a couple of months or so, so I'm learning to save my credits on more important stuff."

But not every move to scrimp on phone expenses works.

"Ever since I switched to postpaid, *mas magastos*," said Dewey, a 24-year-old programmer.

Jugs, 24, agreed. "When I signed up for a plan, *akala ko makakatipid ako. Hindi pala.*"

Some respondents express a wish for better phone plans.

"I usually don't consume all of my free minutes. It's the text service that loads up my bill," said Chino, a 23-year-old journalist.

Jules agreed. "I think I spend too much because current plans are not SMS-friendly. *Konti lang* allotment for texting. In the US, there are plans wherein you pay $30 and you get free SMS, 1,000 minutes and free calls nationwide during weekends!"

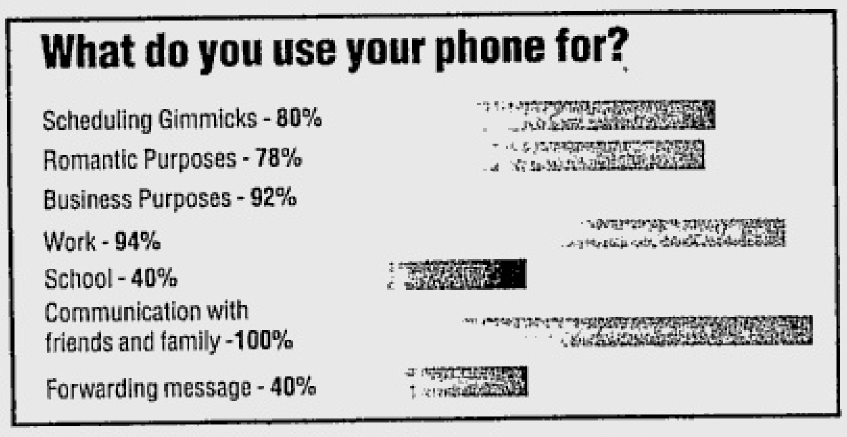
Many respondents agreed that they've been using their phone less. "I got tired of texting too much," Joyce, a 26-year-old editorial production assistant said.

A number were even incredulous when asked if they still send forwarded messages. The cutesy quotes and little graphics are now viewed with disdain.

"Maybe we're growing up," one respondent said.

Maybe. Or perhaps the novelty has just worn off.

E-mail the author at ppastor@inquirer.com.ph


What do you use your phone for?

Sony Ericsson
"MY plan is P900 a month. I have a personal limit of P1,500, but I make sure I don't exceed it, since I don't work or pay for my bill, and it would be unfair to my Dad."—Tammy, 20, student

Sony Ericsson
JR, a 22-year-old interactive producer, spends at least P500 on his mobile phone every month.

Sony Ericsson
"HARD core prepaid 'to, man!" —Cely, 23, marketing assistant

Sony Ericsson
"I USE my phone for only reasonable purposes most of the time." —Marla, 17, student

Sony Ericsson
"MY mobile phone spending hasn't ballooned... I surf the Net with a personal computer and trade quotes with sheets of paper. My mobile phone does neither."—Jeff, 20, student

Sony Ericsson
"*LUMALAKI* bill *ko pag* December because of rackets."—Shahani, 21, stylist and writer

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Her ex has moved on, why can't she?

Niño Mark Sablan & September Mabino

DEAR Mark and Sep,

My ex and I have been apart for more than a year already. I can say I'm over him, but I still long for him sometimes. I have no regrets. It's just that we didn't have the chance to clear up things before we parted ways. It could have been mainly because he found someone else even before we broke up. I really didn't know that. It was just my instincts that told me to break up with him, that we should end our relationship of almost three years. I know I had faults, too, but I tried to patch things up with him. He wanted to end everything. They say if you love someone, let him go. And that's exactly what I did. I can tell he's happy because we're in the same school and I'd see them sometimes. I'm not hurt or jealous now. I'm used to it.

Still... he has found a life on his own without me, so why can't I? I suppose part of the reason is that we belong to the same *barkada*. But our friends make sure they get along with us separately. Sometimes they really make me think since they tell me often that he asks about my studies. Of course, it does me good, but I hate hearing things like those because I think they hold me back from getting into another relationship. Honestly, I haven't been into any other relationship since our breakup. Now I think I can't get into another. What will I do? I want to forget about him and the love I still have for him!

BLUE_PIGLET

Breakups happen because of many reasons, and when one doesn't know the exact reasons for the split, he or she is prone to a prolonged single life or to a series of rebound relationships that simply won't work.

So exercise your brain cells and your own brand of honesty and reflect upon the split. Figure out who's mainly responsible for it, and don't forget to enumerate your own faults as well. Learn from them and make sure you don't repeat them in the future.

It is good for you that you have friends who support you and your ex equally. Although I can never tell if the things your friends tell you are true or are simply a ploy to get you back together, moving on solely depends on you. At the end of an exhausting day, you decide if you move on or not.

What's stopping you from plunging into a new love life is your love for him or maybe the hope for reconciliation. With your ex in a new and happy relationship and you stuck in the middle of nowhere, I think you owe yourself a brand new start and another chance at love.

Your individual states should be enough to get your bottom moving. Don't let him lead a happy life without you enjoying the same.

Let him go. He has found a new love. It's time for you to find yours. Good luck and have fun.

MARK

Seems that a certain someone here needs closure. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

You have to admit, though, that being boggled and disturbed still by a breakup after almost a year would seem extreme or even pathetic to other people. I'm not calling you either, but it is just that sometimes, people tend to keep tabs on their exes.

Add to that the age-old truth that misery loves company and you get one morphed perspective: happiness of an ex spells being a loser on your part. Now, you may have admitted that you're not jealous of your ex's new relationship, but your stuck-in-a-love-rut complaint and your keeping tabs on the guy (and believe me, you are) say there's more here than what you're just saying.

My suggestion is, if you really want to get to the bottom of the breakup, talk about it with your ex. That definitely sounds scary, and I can only imagine how uncomfortable that would be for you both, but it is the only way for you to get the closure that you need.

It seems as if one-sided rationalization has not been enough to help you get over things, so having the other party's side might hold the answer.

However, if you're understandably reluctant to follow that suggestion, then I say, "Move on."

No, really. Whatever motivates you to accomplish your goals, whatever personal method you have that helps keep you on track on any other aspect of your life, use them.

If you have to chant self-empowerment mantras every morning, by all means, do. If you have to have a motivational life soundtrack to help you cope, then go and burn a CD.

My point here is for you to really be able to take charge of your romantic life again, you have to want that with your whole being and you have to be a hundred percent willing to achieve just that.

There's no wimpy, self-pitying and self-defeating way about it. Pain is valid, a heartbreak can be arresting, but they can be overcome; you can be "healed." You just have to want it really bad.

SEPTEMBER

Move those muscles and e-mail the writers at markandsep@yahoo.com

Chatroom is inviting letter senders to indicate if they want their e-mail address printed so wannabe Marks and Seps out there can send in their own comments and advice.

Battling the bulge the easy way

Vanity Fare

Lora Gabol

I WAS stuck in an awfully cranky mood the past few days—not because I was PMS-ing, but because of cruel, self-imposed starvation.

I tried to bail myself out of diet prison by making my sweat glands work overtime, but after jogging a mere two rounds on the track oval, my *kain-tulog* self collapsed into a heap of saddlebags and *bilbil*. I learned the true meaning of stamina the hard (and achy) way.

Yup, like everyone else (or so I'd like to think), I allowed my appetite to take over reason the past Christmas season. Needless to say, my two-week buffet lifestyle went straight to my thighs before I could say "damage control."

Before I attempt another drastic diet and exercise strategy that would probably leave me with a thunderous disposition, and strained muscles rather than a firm butt and toned abs, I will try to take the easy way out of Flabville.

Ladies (and gentlemen, too), say hello to weight loss in a bottle! And I don't mean the oral (and potentially dangerous) kind.

L'Oreal Perfect Slim. This refreshing body gel works two ways to give you a bulge-free silhouette: Gingko-Caffeine blasts fat cells and drains water retention, while patented Par-Elastyl promotes skin elasticity for a firmer, more toned appearance.

I like using it before my hectic everyday schedule kicks off because unlike other formulas, this one doesn't leave me feeling annoyingly sticky. It doesn't take 10 minutes in front of an electric fan to "dry off," so it's a definite must-have for girls who are constantly on the go.

The "L'Oreal method" of applying the product is suggested to reap maximum results, so be sure to thoroughly massage it in—don't just slather it on.

I don't look like being a living testimonial to Perfect Slim just yet, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't just my imagination when I almost effortlessly slipped into a pair of non-stretch jeans I had struggled to fit into last New Year (and I very much doubt the two rounds of running did it).

Avon Cellusculpt. This one got a lot of raves from friends and relatives alike. A girlfriend claimed to have lost an inch after a month of religiously applying Avon's newest cellulite-busting treatment every morning and before bedtime, while an aunt dropped a pant size after just a month and a half.

Magic? Not really. Caffeine goes beyond Starbucks territory and currently rules the body-sculpting scene with its anti-fat, anti-water retention capabilities.

Avon's formula is light and cool, plus it doesn't stain even the sheerest of clothes. This is also a winner for the budget- and body-conscious crowd, as it doesn't drain your allowance like it does stubborn fat.

Shiseido Body Creator. Truly an "electrifying" experience, putting on Shiseido's Body Creator is like having a million tiny fingers massaging your body—you can literally feel it working, sort of like "scaring" the fat off with its spicy, potent scent.

More than a slimming formula, this hydro-gel does double duty by delivering the stimulating effects of aromatherapy as well. The invigorating combo of grapefruit and different spices brings on a hot-cold sensation—quite difficult to distinguish which one, but it feels so good, I couldn't care less!

It's an instant perk-me-up before a night out. The tingly feeling will really wake you up for a night of partying, and you won't feel as guilty if you end up having one cocktail too many.

You won't lose inches in a snap, but you'll see a difference in your skin texture in as little as two weeks—smoother, firmer, and less orange peel-like.

Phytomer Bodydeclic. I was my own success story a few months back when I dropped not one, but two pant sizes after a month on this miracle worker.

My problem areas (butt, hips and thighs) obviously responded well to marine-based ingredients, but I reckon it was also a mix of a healthier diet (I purposely repressed my chocoholic tendencies then), more physical activity (I was a badminton fiend last summer), and a skimpy bikini dictating my choice of lifestyle that brought about the pound-shedding.

Nevertheless, BodyDeclic definitely fit well in my body-toning regimen. I only had to apply it at night because of its richer formula, but the once-a-day use didn't seem to hold back on results.

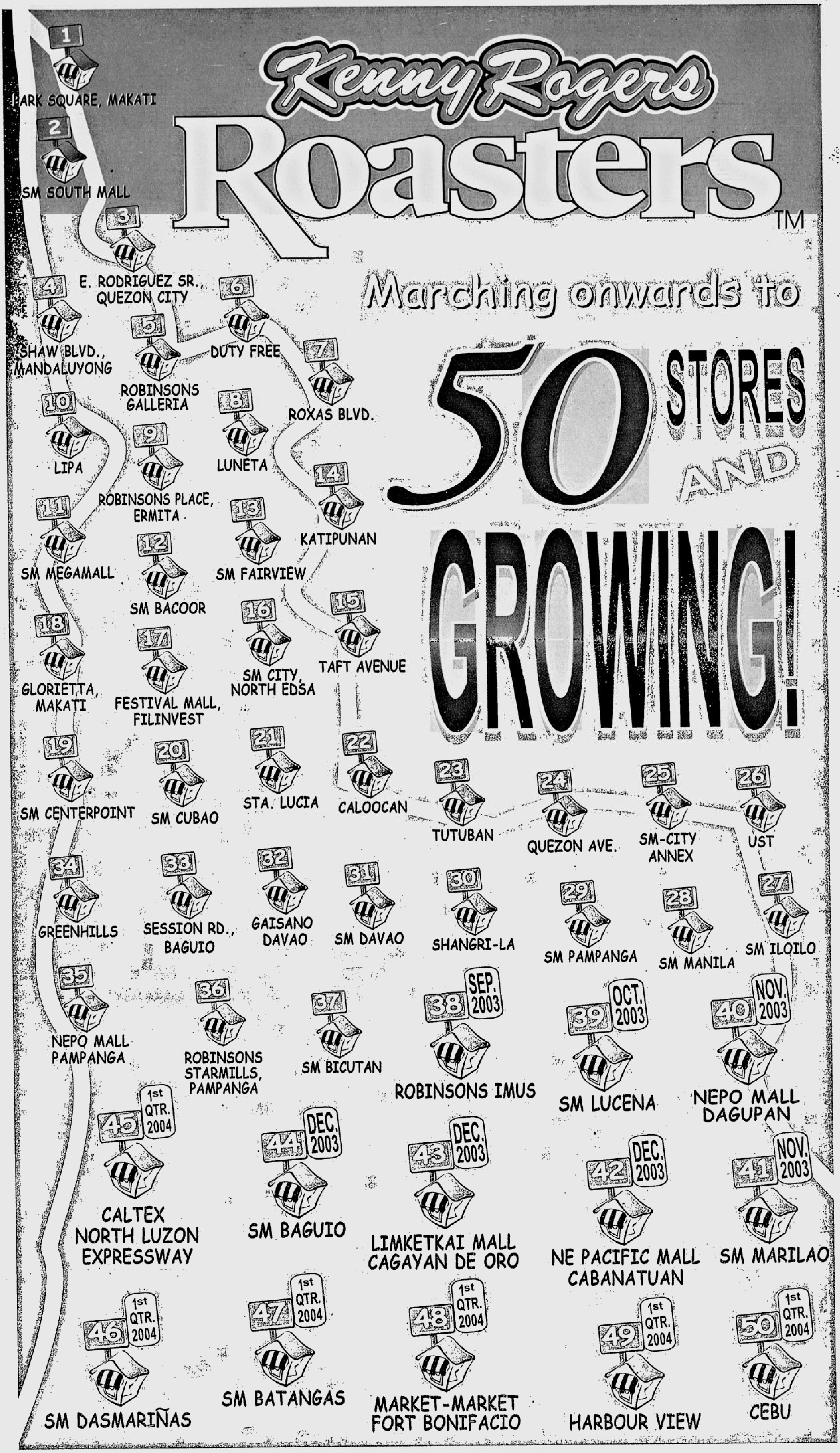
The cream formula is pure luxury, and smells heavenly, too. It's a bit pricier than most products of its kind, but believe me when I say it's a worthy investment. Try the one with SPF, too, if you spend a lot of time under the sun.

While these wonder potions do their magic, remember that nothing beats a lifestyle overhaul—especially if you live on junk food and would rather spend a day lazing around than sweating it out.

Even if you soak in liters of these slimming prods, you won't lose inches if you don't at least try to eat healthy and incorporate an exercise regimen in your schedule. Good luck!

L'Oreal at PCX and leading department stores; Avon at SM Megamall; Shiseido at the Rockwell Powerplant; Phytomer at Rustan's

E-mail the author at pdi_vanityfare@hotmail.com



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